

I'm only going to say this once. I do not own the Harry Potter Universe. That honor belongs to JK Rowling.

This is a dark story and there is no promise of redemption of any kind. If you came into this expecting to read something that will make you feel all warm inside, this is *not* for you. Bad things are going to happen to the characters you care about. If you cannot honestly stomach that kind of depravity, I'd suggest this is the place where you stop reading.

If you're still with me, I'd like to welcome you to a tale that I'm proud of. It has been featured on HarryPotterfanfiction's Top 5. There are almost 800 reviews combined for a total of three sites. There's been many reviewers who have absolutely adored this story, but there have been people that have openly criticized me and ultimately have quit reading because they didn't like the direction of the story. With that said, it *is* a bumpy ride and if you want to understand everything that's going to happen, you **must** pay attention.

My Beta (GinnyGuerra) and I have put a lot of work into this story in order to make it as close to perfection as possible. We have labored long hours in making sure that all spelling and grammar are correct, all sentence/paragraph structures sound readable, all canon is accurate, all characters sound, say, do, and act to how JK Rowling envisioned them, even as many British terms as I possibly could, and just about anything else you can think of.

That doesn't mean this story is flawless. If you notice typos, bring it up. If you find mistakes, show me where. If I use an Americanism that you think I should change, don't hesitate to tell me. If a character acts odd, let me know. ALL opinions are welcome. If you think I should change something, provide me with enough evidence from the books and a logical explanation and I will take your idea VERY seriously.

"Destiny Redefined" is not necessarily a sequel to "In the Words of Ginevra Molly Potter," but it will keep many of the same pairings and plotlines that I have developed previously. In order to fully understand how some of the minor events came to be, you would have to read my previous novel, although I'm fully confident that you'll be able to figure out what's going even if you haven't read it.

I subscribe to the Sensible Universe. This means that I adhere 100 percent to book-canon information, but does not mean I will put as much dedication into post-*Deathly Hallows* revelations. If I feel a piece of information revealed by JK Rowling works better in a different way, I will not feel guilty changing this.

If you are a first time reader, I hope you enjoy the story. If you are a second time reader, I welcome you back and enjoy the changes.

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Without further introduction, I present to you “Destiny Redefined.”

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*Through me you pass into the city of woe:  
Through me you pass into eternal pain:  
Through me among the people lost for aye.*

*Justice the founder of my fabric mov'd:  
To rear me was the task of power divine,  
Supremest wisdom, and primeval love.*

*Before me things create were none, save things  
Eternal, and eternal I endure.  
All hope abandon ye who enter here.*

*-Dante Alighieri, The Divine Comedy*

*A storm is coming, Frank says / A storm that will swallow the children  
/ And I will deliver them from the kingdom of pain / I will deliver the  
children back to their doorsteps / And send the monsters back to the  
underground / I'll send them back to a place where no-one else can  
see them / Except for me*

*-Donnie Darko*

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## **Twenty Years Later**

Harry Potter sat alone in his study at 12 Grimmauld Place. His fingers gripped a quill and his hand slowly slid across the parchment spread across his desk. He stopped and lightly bit the end of the feather. He frowned and then proceeded to cross out the last line he had just written. The scribble joined a myriad of others already decorating the paper. He paused again, leaned back in his chair, and sighed loudly.

He heard thunder crash voraciously outside, disturbing his thoughts. Soon the eerily empty house would be filled with the harsh sound of relentless rain beating down upon the mansion. The creaks and groans, the ones he could never locate to hush, would fill the hallways and disturb him even more.

He glanced down at the paper again. He had never been good at this sort of thing. Back in his Hogwarts days, Hermione had always given him plenty of assistance when it came to writing long-winded essays and assignments. If only she were here, he might already be finished. He imagined her hovering over his shoulder, quill circling his mistakes until she ultimately was disgusted enough with his follies to take the parchment away to finish the work herself. He smiled at the recollection.

He grumbled. Hermione, along with the rest of his family, was already at the castle preparing for the Twenty-Year Anniversary Celebration of Victory-At-Hogwarts Day. Ginny had taken Lily with her to allow Harry to finish the speech he was supposed to give tomorrow. Even with the empty hallways and still rooms, Harry was having difficulty gathering his thoughts, and the promise of a serene environment was cut short again by thunder.

The words blurred as he stared at them. He had already completed a good portion of the speech and he was rather proud of the topic. Inspired by the last three words of the epilogue that JK Rowling had just added to the end of his biographies, he had talked about the good things in his life. It was true, *all was well*. He and Ginny were expecting their fourth child in another two months, Ginny's autobiography was to be released tomorrow, and his godson had proposed to his niece at Christmastime and they were to be married in the summertime. Yes, life was good; *all was well*.

Thunder shook the house.

Life was good, but he was always plagued with sadness around this time. Who could really blame him though? Despite the two-decade old victory, he still missed *them* all terribly. He would often lose himself in the memories of Fred Weasley flying freely over a Quidditch Pitch, of Remus Lupin teaching him how to conjure a Patronus, and of Nymphadora Tonks morphing her nose into a pig's snout. During the celebration and ceremonies, those happy images were traded, despite constant pleading with his own mind, for darker ones in the Great Hall twenty years ago, three bodies laying all in a row, lost in the vast crowd of others dead and even more weeping.

Harry had long ago accepted the deaths. He no longer wished to take them away from whatever afterlife they were in just for the selfish reason of seeing them again. Surely they were happy wherever they were. It wasn't them, nor even himself, that he felt the most for. It was Teddy, who rarely spoke of it to anyone, but Harry and his godson had long conversations about his parents. It was George, who wept bitterly when he and Angelina named their first child Fred. It was Ginny, who was the strongest of the Weasleys, but even she cried around this time, even more now that she was pregnant and her hormones were continuously fluctuating. He *hated* seeing her in such pain.

More and more strangers would stop him on the street to thank him. It was the mothers who always got to him, weeping and thanking him at the same time, even though their child had died fighting, or died running, or just simply died living their lives when Voldemort or one of his Death Eaters took it from them. Harry couldn't help but feel guilty.

No, it wasn't the dead he was worried about, it was the ones left behind.

It was also around this time that his mind wandered dangerously close to wild thoughts. Who had decided that all these hurting survivors were acceptable? What magical force or Supreme Being decided that death, mourning, and acceptance was better than life, happiness, and staying with the ones you loved? He might have united the Hallows and become the Master of Death, but he might never understand why so many people had to suffer for things to be better.

*If only he could have been faster...*

He immediately pushed those thoughts away, asking himself what Ginny would say if she knew what he was thinking. *Ginny*, he thought, tenderly touching a family portrait that sat beside the nearly-finished speech. What would his thoughts have been like if she had not made it, if he had won the battle but lost her? *A hollow victory*, he decided. He didn't even want to imagine the state of mind he would be in if he ever lost her, or any of their children, for that matter.

He ran a hand through his dark hair, settled his finger absentmindedly upon his scar, and traced the fading lightning bolt shape. It was time to stop thinking such thoughts. He pressed his quill against the parchment and resumed his speech.

It would be years later that Harry would look back upon that moment and wonder if his thoughts that particular evening might have set the course for the sinister events that followed, if what he was pondering was the catalyst to what ruined his life and destroyed everything he had worked for. Voldemort was defeated, all was well, but the real enemy had yet to reveal himself.

Thunder shook the house again.

*Everything is determined, the beginning as well as the end, by forces over which we have no control. It is determined for the insect, as well as for the star. Human beings, vegetables, or cosmic dust, we all dance to a mysterious tune, intoned in the distance by an invisible piper.*

*-Albert Einstein*

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## **Chapter One**

### **Once Upon a Time**

The castle was silhouetted against the storm clouds, the fog swallowing up the towers that jutted high into the foreboding sky. A streak of lightning tore through the air, cutting the view of the castle in half, and illuminating the grounds in searing light.

The rain had paused momentarily when Harry left Grimmauld Place and did not resume as he stepped through the gate of Hogwarts. He peered uneasily at the great fortress as lightning cut across his vision again. The aged stone glistened, sending meek twinkles of light every which way. Harry blinked at the fleeting flash and shuddered.

It had never stormed before on the Anniversary. Every single one of those days had been peaceful and beautiful. Even if the tempest had raged on the day before, this celebration would surprisingly cast away all negativity, a sort of unnatural hope on such a solemn day. As Harry observed another flash of lightning, he wondered if the clouds would clear in time for tomorrow. Something though, something deep inside him, told him that chances were slim. Something was different this time. Something was wrong.

“Don’t be stupid,” Harry muttered to himself. Hearing his own voice instead of the violent wind comforted him on some level. He frowned, for as soon as he spoke the words, it felt like a lie. He tucked his arms closer to his body and walked towards the castle.

He neared the portion of the grounds reserved for tomorrow’s ceremonies. Many rows of chairs were placed strategically beside

each other for the students and for the multitudes coming to commemorate this day. He knew plenty of families would remain at home to celebrate in their own personal ways, but most would be arriving early tomorrow. The sheer amount of chairs confirmed that story.

He followed the direction the chairs were pointing and saw the outline of the stage. It was elaborately decorated with balloons and streamers. It wouldn't surprise him if someone had opted for a flock of phoenixes to be released at the beginning. Someone always released something extravagant such as that. Lightning flashed again and he saw someone sitting in the front row.

Harry moved closer, taking each step carefully. His years as a target and his life as Head Auror always made him stride with caution, especially on nights such as this that brought out the strangest sort of characters. When he was close enough to view the stranger, lightning lit up the area again. He grinned, shaking the feeling of trepidation, and walked to join the lone sitter.

"Evening, Teddy," Harry greeted, taking a seat beside his godson.

"Hey, Harry," he said quietly back.

He was hunched over in his seat, drenched hair dangling around his face, hands pressed against his cheeks. Even in the low visibility, Harry could tell what he was doing. His hair would be changing colors, from brown to blue to pink to green, until every shade of the color spectrum would be covered. Teddy was notorious for doing this when something was weighing heavily on his mind.

"Harry, how did you do it?" he asked cryptically.

Harry didn't know what Teddy was talking about. He looked inquisitively at his godson, wondering what the strange question meant, but Teddy had not revealed any more. Harry felt it was only prudent to answer simply and to not ask anything else until Teddy was prepared to expose the rest of his thoughts.

"Do what?"

Teddy swallowed hard. "Victoire and I went to Diagon Alley today. We were looking for wedding bands. A happy occasion, you know?" he paused, breathing in heavily. "The jewellery store clerk was a nice bloke so I can't really blame him. It's not like he knew..."

Harry could feel the anguish Teddy was feeling, but he couldn't yet understand what he was trying to say. He tried to speak, but his tongue felt heavier than normal, and he couldn't put a finger on the reason for that either. He could usually comfort his godson far better than this instead of becoming a speechless prat.

Finally, Harry managed to ask, "What didn't he know?"

"About Mum and Dad," Teddy whispered.

As he looked at Harry, lightning flashed. His face was so unfamiliar. Teddy was perhaps the funniest person Harry had ever known, trained by George Weasley himself. He had constantly created mischief during his seven years at Hogwarts, enough to even rival the Mafrauders. His typical comical face was wet from rain and surely tears, his typical vibrant eyes were dim, and there was no smile. That's what shook Harry the most: the lack of a smile on Teddy Lupin's face.

"It wasn't even a cruel comment," Teddy elaborated. "He just asked if my parents approved of such a beautiful young lady..." He laughed pitifully. "It got me, right here." He placed his hand over his heart and thumped it several times. "I had thought it, but, you know, I hadn't really... Mum and Dad, they're not going to be there..."

Harry placed a strong hand on Teddy's shoulder, trying to comfort him. He could relate a great deal with him, not having had his own parents at his wedding, not having had them with him on the most normal parts of his life. They weren't there to say goodbye to him on his first day of Hogwarts. They weren't there to comfort him when he had killed Quirrell and then when he had killed Voldemort. He thought he was beginning to understand what Teddy had meant earlier by asking him how he had done it.

He was wrong.



“And I thought about you, Harry,” Teddy continued. “You’ve been like a father to me, and Ginny like a mother. And Gran’s always been there... and no offense, but you guys aren’t my parents, and you can’t be, and I know you don’t want to be... If anyone ever understood that, it was you, Harry.”

“I know what it’s like, Teddy,” Harry replied, finally able to offer some sort of paternal comfort.

“So how did you do it?” Teddy asked again. The air was electrifying, all wind had stopped, seemingly preparing for the question before it was asked. “How did you ever give up something like the Resurrection Stone?”

Harry hadn’t been expecting that question, but the inquiry had a profound effect on him. The word shot through his body and numbed every part of him for several seconds. “It was the most difficult thing I’ve ever had to do,” Harry admitted. He dared not reveal how many times he had been tempted over the years to search for it again. “There were just more important things at the time.”

“Voldemort,” Teddy said, nodding. “The Stone would have been my weakness. I just want to talk to them...”

“I couldn’t keep something like that,” Harry said. “I’d be too tempted to just waste away, looking at them, talking to them.” Harry felt the chill of the wind pick up again. “I’d forget who was still there with me, waiting for me.”

“Ginny?” he asked.

“Her,” Harry replied. “And Ron and Hermione, and you. Everyone, actually.”

There was silence between them again. Although Teddy seemed comforted by the words spoken, Harry still couldn’t shake this damned feeling. Why on this night, after thinking so much about it in his study, did Teddy suddenly chose to speak the words that broke his heart? He hated seeing his godson like this, hated watching him hurt, especially since he was rarely even frowning.

"You know the first time I realized how much I love Victoire?" Teddy asked.

Harry forced a smile. They *were* a lot alike, even down to talking about the woman they loved when they were feeling particularly lonely. "First day of Hogwarts this year, wasn't it?"

"No," Teddy replied, chuckling. "That's the first time I admitted anything was going on between us. The first time I knew was when she was injured in my last game. They said she could have died. The feeling it gave me, thinking that I'd never see her again, I couldn't even begin to tell you what that's like."

Harry nodded. "I can guess," Harry said. "You felt like you'd never be the same without her, that if she died, you'd die right along with her?"

"Yeah," Teddy agreed.

When Teddy felt relatively better, he patted Harry on the back and stood to leave. He headed towards the tent where Harry knew he'd find the other members of his family. He was also sure he'd find the tent spacious enough to accommodate everyone staying within. After Teddy lit the torches on either side of the entrance, he went inside.

In the new visibility from the torches, Harry noticed a lone figure at the far side of the tent. Harry stood quickly, expecting the stranger to run when he called to him. "Hey!"

"Harry Potter?" the stranger squawked. Harry peered at the man and tried to place him. In addition to the long black cloak he wore, the man's face was hidden by a hood and strands of dark hair. "Yes," he croaked as he hobbled slowly towards Harry. "Yes, yes, by God, it is you!"

Harry couldn't explain the feeling the man was giving him. He should have been experiencing alert for finding a strange intruder outside his family's tent, but the man seemed to pose no threat. And as odd as that was, the man felt peculiarly familiar. "Have we met?" Harry asked.

The man settled himself down in a chair, making enough noises wheezing and banging to wake up the whole slumbering castle.

“What?” he asked and continued without an answer. “No, no, at least not in the literal meaning of the question.” He cackled, a strange sort of laugh, and thunder grumbled uneasily.

“For all intents and purposes, no, Harry Potter, we have not met,” he said. “William Emmett Cronus.” He held his hand out to Harry. In the faint light, Harry could see the wrinkly, almost sickly-looking skin. “Go on!” William bellowed. “You’ve seen worse, haven’t you?”

With much hesitation, Harry took the hand and shook it. Surprisingly, it felt warm, as if the man had not just been wandering in the bitter wind. Harry would have usually said it was a pleasure to meet him, but in all honesty, Harry felt no such thing. Instead, he asked, “What are you doing here?”

“Come for the celebration tomorrow, haven’t I?” he answered, letting out a violent cough from deep in his chest, leaving him looking weak. The cough rocked the old man’s body. At least, Harry assumed it was an old man. He hadn’t properly seen his face yet. When he cleared his throat, William said, “Saw you talking to your godson, yes?”

Harry nodded.

William motioned to the tent. “Suspect your family is sleeping there tonight,” he mumbled. “The wife, too?”

There was something in William’s voice that caused panic in Harry’s mind. He felt uncomfortable and every protective urge surfaced. If this man dared to even threaten his family, he would kill him without regret. He instinctively reached into his pocket and grasped his wand.

“A bit dramatic, aren’t we?” William said. “Put the wand away, boy, I’m not here to threaten anyone.” He patted Harry on the knee and laughed again. “No, you’re not there yet. Tell you what, after you’ve had your speech tomorrow, you come visit me. I’ll have all the answers to your questions.”

As the man struggled to stand, Harry frowned. “What questions do I have?” he asked.

“Department of Mysteries is where you’ll find me,” William wheezed, ignoring the question posed. “And don’t worry about clearance, no, don’t you worry at all. I’ll take care of that.” He hobbled off into the darkness, cackling loudly, and muttering to himself. “Yes, yes, I’ll take care of that.”

Harry stood there for several seconds, pondering the man’s words. It was perhaps the strangest experience that he had ever had in his life. He couldn’t be sure if William Cronus was even right in the head. As he walked towards the tent, he ran the conversation in his mind again, trying to make sense of some of the gibberish spoken.

“It’s about time you made it.”

Recognizing Hermione's voice, Harry looked up as he entered the tent, pushing the flaps away as he glanced around. Hermione was sitting at the table with a book, skimming over the pages. “Evening, Hermione, what are you reading?” he asked.

*“Extraordinary Discoveries of the Last 500 Years and the Wizards Who Made Them,”* Hermione answered, reading the title to him. “Someone sent it to me today in the mail. I’m guessing they want to me to write a blurb, but I don’t have the slightest idea who sent it.”

“Does it really matter?” Harry asked, knowing the detail wouldn’t stop her from reading it.

“Ha ha,” she replied lamely, marking her page and closing the book. “I was afraid I’d have to come over and finish the speech for you.”

Harry chuckled, the dreary feeling that had bothered him earlier diminishing. “I was hoping you would,” he replied, “but I got it finished. All is well.”

“You went with that theme!” Hermione exclaimed, clasping her hands together excitedly. “Are you prepared then? Do you want to read it to me?”

Harry shook his head. He reached into his coat pocket, pulled the rolled-up parchment from within, and handed it to her. “Make sure it sounds okay,” he said, looking towards the room where he knew

Ginny had to be. He had this sudden urge just to be near her. "Can you do me one more favor?"

She had already unraveled the scroll and was marking it in several places. When she looked back up, she said, "Sure, Harry."

"Could you find all you can about a William Cronus?"

Hermione frowned. "Sounds familiar," she replied. When Harry agreed, she continued, "Any idea where I should start or is that all you have? A name?"

"He said he works in the Department of Mysteries."

Hermione rolled her eyes. "Then I'm not sure how much I'll be able to find." Harry looked at her in an odd way and Hermione made a noise of annoyance. "Honestly, Harry, you're so daft sometimes. If you work in that Department, you might as well not exist."

Harry had not dealt with that division of the Ministry at all. In all his years working as an Auror, it was the one place he never went to or met anyone from. "Do they erase your past?" he asked.

"If you mean there are no records that you actually lived, then yes," Hermione answered. "They're called Unspeakables for a reason."

This strange gentleman was becoming more and more mysterious. Harry clicked his tongue against the roof of his mouth and shrugged. "Well, if you find anything, let me know." He pointed towards the back room. "My wife back there?"

"She is," Hermione replied. "And she's been waiting for you."

"She's okay, right?" Harry asked, a bit worried.

Hermione shrugged. "You know how she is. She'll only let *you* see her cry."

Harry's heart ached tremendously as he thought that she shouldn't have a reason to cry. He wrapped an arm around Hermione, bid her goodnight, and left the room. He walked into the hallway carefully and

saw several doors. If he had to guess, James, Albus, and Rose were all sleeping in one of those rooms since they hadn't seen their families since Christmas, making Hugo and Lily happy to spend time with their siblings.

One of the doors opened and a beautiful redheaded witch gracefully slipped out as quietly as she could. Even after having three children and one more on the way, Harry thought she still looked amazing. Her bulging belly contrasted with her light frame. She didn't even notice Harry until he called out softly to her. "Fancy meeting you here."

Ginny turned, smiling, and was ecstatic to see him, even after only one day apart. In the dim light, her smile conflicted with her puffy eyes. "Harry!" she whispered and practically tackled him.

His gentle hands reached onto her cheeks and rubbed the skin directly below her eyes. "You okay?"

"Damned hormones," she replied lamely, standing on her tiptoes to kiss him. Her bloated belly bumped him. Pulling back, she said, "Of course, you wouldn't believe it was only that..."

Harry nodded, stroking a loose strand of her hair. "It's one of those days for all of us."

She blinked rapidly, squinting the tears away. She pointed towards the room she had exited minutes ago. "I was watching the boys sleep. It's comforting."

"I'm surprised they *are* asleep," Harry remarked.

"Dudley and Dominick wore them out today," Ginny replied, referencing his cousin and his child. She led him towards the bedroom. "No time even for a story about their dad," she said, opening the door. "I was relieved, too, they've been asking about the Hallows."

As Ginny sat down on the edge of the bed, Harry froze at the mention of the Hallows. First Teddy, now his children? Something ominous filled Harry insides and dread clouded his mind. He snapped back to

reality when a slippered foot bumped him lightly in the shin. He glanced down at the foot and back up at Ginny.

“Pamper me?” she asked.

Harry sank slowly to his knees and pulled her slippers off. He gripped her calf lovingly and slid his hands slowly down to her foot. He smiled affectionately up at her and began to rub.

“I really shouldn’t be feeling so glum,” Ginny said, followed by a long yawn. “It’s been such a good year.” She laid a hand across her stomach, and then pointed towards the bedside nightstand.

Harry’s eyes followed her finger and saw a thick book propped up. The cover read “In the Words of Ginevra Molly Potter” and a cartoonish drawing of a miniature Ginny stood at Platform 9  $\frac{3}{4}$  watching a smaller version of Harry.

“I suppose it’s stupid of me to ask for a sneak peak,” Harry wondered aloud, moving from her left foot to her right.

Ginny checked the clock. “Only two minutes to midnight,” she said. She reached down and gently tugged Harry closer. “But forget about that. I have this nagging feeling that something bad is going to happen. Just hold me all night... please?”

Midnight passed. The rain began to fall.

*Nothing is hopeless. We must hope for everything.*

*-Madeleine L'Engle, A Wrinkle in Time*

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**Author's Note:** According to JK Rowling post-Deathly Hallows revelation, Hannah Abbott owns the Leaky Cauldron, not the Three Broomsticks as I have written in the following chapter. If it makes your inner-uber-killer-fan feel better, how about Hannah owns both?

## **Chapter Two**

### **A Swiftly Tilting Planet**

Harry bolted up in bed, gasping. His hand instinctively reached for his scar, but he knew it hadn't hurt. It hadn't hurt him for exactly twenty years. And the dream he had was not a vision of Voldemort's mind, but rather a past event that was replaying in his head: his mum and dad, screaming, dying...

"Fred..."

Harry looked towards Ginny. She was in a cold sweat, her expression one of pain. He placed a hand on her cheek, stroking it softly, and stayed awake until she had calmed down. He kissed her forehead softly, looking up at the clock in the process. 6:30 AM. In another two and a half hours, the daylong celebration would begin. He didn't want to return to sleep, so he stood, and stole one more glance at Ginny before he exited the room.

Thoughts of Ginny stayed with him as he walked out of the bedroom. Her nightmares had never gone away as much as his did and he felt guilty about that as well. If only he would have paid Ginny a little more attention in her first year, she wouldn't have felt the need to write in that diary.

"Stop it," he commanded himself, using the same comforting words Ginny would say to him, but they failed when coming from anyone else but her. No other year had ever been this bad since that first one. What was it about this particular year that was getting to him? He



groaned loudly and entered the kitchen, only to find Hermione cooking breakfast and sipping tea.

“Did you sleep at all, Hermione?” Harry asked. When he smelled the aroma of eggs and bacon, he suddenly felt very hungry. He forgotten to eat any dinner yesterday.

Hermione shook her head and pointed towards the table. A piece of parchment with writing on it sat there. “I can’t believe I found it,” she said, “but there’s your Mr. Cronus.”

Harry picked the paper up hesitantly. He wanted to question the strange gentleman, but he really didn’t know what to ask him. He looked down at Hermione’s neat handwriting. “Hogsmeade?” Harry asked. “He’s renting from Hannah and Neville. Do you think I’ll have time before the ceremony starts?”

“Do you really think this Cronus is worth interrupting your morning for?” Hermione asked, flicking her wand at the food. The eggs sizzled loudly on the stove.

Harry shrugged. He couldn’t explain what it was about this man, whether or not he was a threat or just some crazy old codger. All he knew was that something wasn’t adding up. Harry showered, changed, and was out the door with nothing but Hermione’s warning not to be late following him.

Hannah and Neville owned the Three Broomsticks and several of the apartments above it. As Harry passed by the Longbottoms’ door, Neville himself came out to fetch *The Daily Prophet* on his welcome mat. Wearing an undershirt and boxers, Neville greeted Harry with a sheepish smile.

“Morning, Harry,” he said, bending down to pick up the paper. “A bit early for a house call, isn’t it?” Neville turned the paper to the front and glanced at the headline.

Harry decided not to waste much time. He didn’t have a whole lot of it before the ceremony was supposed to begin. He stuck to the matter at hand, looked towards the apartment one door from where they stood, and asked, “Who lives in that one, Neville?”

Neville scratched his chin in thought. "Strange last name... Cronus, but I can't remember his first name."

"Maybe William?"

Neville nodded affirmatively. "Sounds about right. Is this official Auror business?"

Harry shook his head. "No," he answered. *At least not yet*, he thought. "What can you tell me about him?"

"The best tenant we've ever had."

"What do you mean?"

"He never complains, never needs anything," Neville replied as he rolled the paper to resemble a scroll. "Rent is always on time..." Neville furrowed his brow. "Come to think of it, I think the last time I saw him was when he first rented the place... Wow, three years ago..."

"Does he still live there?"

"I assume so," Neville replied. He frowned, perhaps finally realizing how strange the arrangement was.

"If you don't mind, I'm going to see if he's home," Harry said and Neville waved an ushering hand towards the apartment. Harry walked cautiously towards the door and stopped in front of it, the four gleaming. He raised his hand and knocked. Although there was no answer from within, the door moved upon his fist's impact.

The creak of the door echoed off the silent hallway as Harry and Neville held their breaths. Harry peered inside. "I don't think anyone's been here for a long time," Harry said, pushing the door open further. Neville came closer and looked over Harry's shoulder into the apartment.

The room was completely bare. Neither carpet nor decorations furnished the room, nothing on the wall at all, not even outlines on the floor where furniture had been or on the walls where frames of

pictures and portraits had hung. The only thing, which stood mysteriously in the center of the room in plain sight from the door, was a small stand about four feet high. The morning sunlight glistened off the polished hardwood surface.

"Maybe that's why we never see him," Neville muttered. He patted Harry on the shoulder. "Don't go in there alone. I'm going to go change."

Harry barely heard Neville before he walked away. His hand gripped the doorknob as he stepped inside the abandoned room towards the stand. His heart beat wildly as he neared, seeing a lonely pieces of paper sitting in the middle of the tabletop.

A feeling of cold rushed over him, every sense awakening and alerting him to his surroundings. The creaks tensed him as he let go of the door and took the first step away from it. From where he was, he could tell the stand was covered in dust, the paper, too. As if an unseen force or a magnetic attraction had mesmerized him, he was beside the stand. Harry reached down and his fingertips touched the grime. He leisurely brushed the dust away, revealing several words.

*"I hope you have a happy Twenty-Year Anniversary  
Come with questions."*

Harry swallowed hard as he turned the paper over, expecting the worst. Staring back at him was a battered copy of the same photograph that was on his desk at home. He and his family looking happy, but the picture looked so worn. He trembled in anger as he considered the possibilities of how William came in possession of this picture.

"Harry, what is it?" Neville called from behind him.

Harry couldn't speak. He held up what he had found to show Neville. Neville took the photograph and grunted. "How...?"

Harry's eyes scanned the room quickly, looking for any other signs of Cronus, but nothing else revealed itself. Harry was shaken considerably. "I don't know, Neville," Harry said, taking the

photograph back. "It looks like it's been here a long time. Of course, he could have just made it appear that way."

"Aren't you trained to detect that kind of magic?" Neville asked, although he didn't need the question answered. The look in Harry's eyes said it all. There was no evidence of magical tampering with this scene, at least none fresh enough to detect.

Harry heard the distant sound of a trumpet. He looked out the window, through the rain, and saw the castle. He realized that the Hogwarts band was practicing before the ceremony began. Harry checked his watch and swore. "It's almost nine. I... I got to go."

Harry had barely a minute to spare as he rushed towards the stage. The crowds were chattering beneath a large canopy to protect them from the rain. The band played mellow music as Harry approached the stage. He paused, watching Kingsley speak to the crowd first.

Someone tugged on his sleeve. "Harry," Hermione's voice whispered. "As soon as you're done, we *need* to talk."

Harry heard Kingsley giving his introduction and the crowd cheered loudly. Harry grabbed her wrists and bent closer to her ear. "Is it about Cronus?" She nodded and Harry continued. "I need to find him as soon as possible."

Hermione pushed him onto the stage. Harry looked into the vast audience, saw Ginny and his children in the front row, and reached for his speech. He couldn't find it. With a panicked look, he caught Ginny's eye. She smiled as she held up his scroll. Harry summoned it to light laughter from the crowd.

Harry saw *her* before she started speaking. An older woman, maybe in her fifties, began walking towards the stage. Harry could tell, even from the distance, that she would have been quite attractive if she didn't look so tired and worn out. Later, looking back, Harry would recall it all happening so quickly.

"YOU!!!" she screamed. Everyone in the crowd jumped from her high-pitched scream. Her long slender finger was pointed directly at Harry, her hair disheveled, and her eyes danced like a lunatic.

"The *great* Harry Potter!" she shouted, stepping closer with every word, her tone reeking of contempt. "I've waited twenty years for this moment, two decades to gather the courage to face you!"

Harry wanted to speak, but he was frozen to his spot, as well as everyone else around them. The sky grumbled, mirroring the mood of the woman, the rain steadily thumping on the canvas. The speech he held seemed not to matter anymore and it dropped from his hand onto the floor. He just stared in disbelief at the woman while she continued.

"My boy died this morning!" she screamed, now at the end of the long row of chairs. "Take a guess when he was cursed? For twenty years, he suffered under the dark magic of the Death Eaters, eventually falling into a sleep I couldn't raise him from! He died this morning, exactly twenty years since he received the curse!"

She was gripping the end of the stage, her fingernails breaking as she dug into the floor. Her face was deep red in fury, spit flying out of her mouth in rage. No one moved. No one could stop the woman's strange enchantment. Everyone awaited the accusation that was sure to follow.

"IT'S YOUR FAULT!"

Harry hung his head low, feeling the icy words wrap their fingers around his heart and squeeze it. He wouldn't respond to the woman, wouldn't offer any comfort, because that's not what she needed. And as much as it pained him to admit, he felt he deserved the anger and the blame. He had, after all, felt responsible for all the pain and heartache, and no amount of explanations from anyone had been able to sway his thoughts.

"I've read your damn biographies, Harry Potter!" she went on. "Taking your damned time, camping out in the woods, all the while people were dying and you didn't care!"

Ginny jumped from her chair in protest, a hard, angry look on her face. "And what would you have done different?" Ginny screamed, pulling her wand from her pockets and pointing it at the woman.

"I would have been faster!" she shrieked. "I don't know how you could have married him, how you could look into his eyes every day, knowing that he killed your brother."

Ginny let out a scream as Harry had never heard her cry before. Hermione and Ron jumped from the chair to restrain Ginny as she fired a familiar purple and black spell towards the woman. It was fortunate that the spell missed. The crowd came unglued.

As several Ministry workers ushered the woman away, Harry snapped away from his trance and met Ginny's side. Arthur and Molly were taking their grandchildren away from the scene. Hermione and Ron, after Harry came, let go of Ginny and left the two alone.

"Ginny, calm down," Harry said quietly.

"Calm down?" Ginny hissed. "*Calm down?* Did you hear that woman?"

Harry nodded and didn't respond. He felt horrible, yes, but wasn't it the truth? That woman had spoken what Harry had always felt but was too afraid to dwell his thoughts on or admit out loud. She had released the feelings that he should have done things faster. He could have avoided the Final Battle, saving countless families.

"Don't you dare!" Ginny screamed, her inhibitions with Harry falling completely away. She was raging mad, but that didn't stop the tears from falling freely. "Don't you dare listen to her! It's not your fault! Damn you, Harry, it's not your fault."

"But it is," he whispered, his mouth dry. He had never denied Ginny like that, mostly because she had that kind of calming effect on him; she could make him believe he could levitate a mountain. And that's what she had done, he decided, made him believe such an impossible deception. He just couldn't be happy living a lie anymore. He would need to be miserable in a truth.

The ceremony was called off. The celebration was canceled. In the midst of all that, Harry and Ginny had their biggest fight to date. Harry found himself walking aimlessly through the Hogwarts grounds, reliving the places the Final Battle had changed. He eventually

stopped in front of the white tomb of the former Headmaster, where he had returned the Elder Wand many years ago.

He pulled out the old and battered photograph of his family. He looked at Ginny, so happy, and he looked at himself. He was happy in the picture as well, and right now he felt envious of the figures moving around in the picture. They were forever captured in a moment of contentment, never knowing anything more than the pleasure of that particular place in time. Raindrops fell upon it, splattering some of the remaining dust away.

*Cronus*, he thought, *you will not threaten my family.*

"You should really be with your wife." Hermione stood beside him and placed a hand on his shoulder. She glanced down at the photo. "Why look at a photo when you have the real thing waiting for you at home?"

"Cronus had this in his apartment," Harry said. "Where can I find him?"

Hermione sighed and didn't press the issue with him and Ginny. Harry wondered if she really thought they wouldn't work it out. Harry knew they would, it was only a matter of time. He just needed to be alone, away from her, and gather his thoughts.

Hermione pulled the books she had been reading the night before from her robes. She handed it to him. "Harry, you need to be completely honest with me right now. Did you really talk to Cronus?"

Harry blinked, tearing his gaze away from Dumbledore's tomb. "What? Yes, of course, why would I lie to you?"

"Because William Emmett Cronus has been dead since 1776."

Yesterday      This      Day's      Madness      did      prepare;  
Tomorrow's      Silence,      Triumph,      or      Despair:  
Drink! for you know not whence you came, nor why:  
Drink! for you know not why you go, nor where.

-Edward Fitzgerald

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## Chapter Three

### Pilgrimage

Harry doubted the revelation that Hermione had given him. He repeated the words in his head as he stared at her in disbelief. It was impossible, he thought. He had *seen* Cronus, spoken to him, even *touched* that sickly-looking skin. Not to mention that Neville could at least corroborate part of his story. He wouldn't make something like this up, and he expected Hermione to know him better than that.

"I'm sorry," Hermione said, breathing heavily. "You've just been acting strange lately."

"Strange enough to make up a story that I met him? Harry asked. "Do you think I rented an apartment three years ago and planted evidence in that apartment to suggest someone has been trespassing in my house? Honestly, Hermione, why would I do that?"

She pointed towards the book. Harry glanced down at it for the first time. It was the same book that Hermione had been reading the night before: *Extraordinary Discoveries of the Last 500 Years and the Wizards Who Made Them* by Patricia Pilgrim. On the front, several witches and wizards stood proudly upon an undersized earth.

"Because you were looking to justify what you're planning," Hermione answered.

Harry was completely confused. He wasn't planning anything, short of finding Cronus and arresting him for trespassing. Maybe he could even get him for threatening him and his family. Harry gave her a questioning look. "Hermione, seriously, I'm not planning anything."



“Read, then.”

Harry saw the book marker and opened to the page. He was surprised to find that William Emmett Cronus was the main topic. Glancing back up at Hermione, she stood there with a stone-cold expression and her arms crossed. She moved her head a fraction and urged him to read.

**“William Emmett Cronus** (1610?-1776) was one of the leading Wizarding researchers for time travel of his day. Before his theories and work were proved to be realistic, travelling forwards or backwards through time was thought to be ludicrous. Cronus proved the naysayers wrong when he invented the Time-Turner, a magical device that can send the owner back in time for several hours. When he was stopped shortly after his invention, Cronus was working on a potion for long-term time travel.

The Time-Turner has been subject to many changing laws. The first one invented was made illegal by the 18th Century Ministry. By the 19th Century, sadly, just three decades after Cronus’s death, the Time-Turner was legalized under strict governmental supervision for academic, historic, and intellectual endeavors. In the late 20th Century, use or construction of Time-Turners were once again banned when a fight between Death Eaters and Dumbledore’s Army destroyed the whole stock.

Time travel is considered among many experts to be dark magic. Others feel that it is a revolutionary magic with the potential to be used for either positive or negative intentions. The current administration feels it raises too many ethical questions, such as if it would be acceptable to return a dark wizard’s past and stop him before he ever performs his first dark deed.

It also raises far too many paradox questions. It creates the Predestination Paradox, for example if a man travels back in time to discover the cause of a famous fire. While in the building where the fire started, he accidentally knocks over a kerosene lantern and causes a fire, the same fire that would inspire him, years later, to travel back in time. This is often called a casual loop.

*It creates the Grandfather Paradox. Suppose a man traveled back in time and killed his biological grandfather before the latter met the traveler's grandmother. As a result, one of the traveler's parents (and by extension, the traveler himself) would never have been conceived. This would imply that he could not have traveled back in time after all, which in turn implies the grandfather would still be alive, and the traveler would have been conceived, allowing him to travel back in time and kill his grandfather. Thus each possibility seems to imply its own negation, a type of logical paradox.*

*Before Cronus died in 1776, he offered a theory that has been deemed outlandish and almost heretical. He presented the idea that humans do not follow a straight time line in the normal usage of the word. They are, in fact, one version of a long list of other versions. Cronus said, "The infant I was 100 years ago is NOT the same me as I am right now. We are only two in a set of many."*

*He said that this would solve the paradoxes. No matter what was changed, the person changing it would remember everything that happened in both timelines. The ones uninvolved in the change would not know that there ever was an alternate reality, but would be able to "sense" it. Memories would manifest themselves as déjà vu and unexplained depression, especially if you were mourning someone who was previously deceased. Those who were "resurrected" might feel extremes in positive emotion or negative emotion.*

*Time traveling, Cronus theorized, would be extremely harmful if repeated over many years, resulting in the breakdown of physical, psychological, and emotional components. Catastrophic and unpredictable events would certainly follow.*

*Since his theories were met with fear, he was banned from working on them or from creating his potion. It is rumored that Ministry officials ransacked his house, took all his findings, and stored them away to be extensively studied in the Department of Mysteries.*

*William E. Cronus was buried in the cemetery of Godric's Hollow, where he was born, raised, lived, and did the majority of his research.*

*Despite his controversial ideas, it cannot be denied that Cronus was one of history's leading men in the world of magic."*

By the time Harry came to the end of the entry, he was strangely intrigued. He swallowed the lump in his throat and placed the picture of his family inside the book to mark it. He closed the book and looked into Hermione's accusatory eyes.

"Well?" she asked.

"I have never read this before," he answered. Hermione gave him a doubting look, but Harry stuck to his story. "Could it be possible that Cronus figured out to make the potion and he's now living *here* in this time?

Hermione looked skeptical. "I'd sooner believe it's his descendant..." she answered, changing her approach. "Or even that someone is messing with you."

Harry disagreed. "It makes sense," he replied. "Can you imagine if it *is* him? Think of the possibilities."

Hermione shook her head quickly. "You know how dangerous it is to mess with time," Hermione said slowly. "Things happen they way they're supposed to happen."

"That sure doesn't provide me with comfort-"

"Is that what this is all about?" Hermione asked, raising her voice. "You want to feel better about your life? Having a beautiful, loving wife who would do anything for you and having three wonderful kids and one more on the way doesn't provide enough happiness for you?"

"It's not about me!" Harry shouted, slamming his fist against the book. "I can't stand looking at Teddy knowing that Tonks and Lupin won't be at his wedding. I can't stand looking at Ginny knowing that it was my fault that Fred is-"

*Smack!*

Hermione's hand came across his face hard. Harry's cheek stung, but whether it was the smack that hurt the most or who was doing the smacking, he didn't know. He placed a hand on his cheek and felt the already reddening skin.

"Are you listening to what you're suggesting?" Hermione shouted. "I... you... I can't..." She let out a frustrated howl and walked away.

Harry didn't know what to feel. Never had Hermione reacted to him in such a way. He had some wild theories in his lifetime about things, but it never provoked Hermione enough to use physical force. He touched his cheek tenderly again and winced at the stinging sensation.

He looked at Dumbledore's tomb again, wondering what it would have been like if the old wizard was still alive, if he had never put on the Gaunt ring. Surely the war would have been over far quicker. Surely Voldemort would have never infiltrated the Ministry as he did. But as much as the idea inflamed him and burrowed deep into his soul, he couldn't bring himself to accept that as a possibility.

It was time to return home and let this evening, and this feeling, pass away.

Harry entered his house. The building was dim. Maybe Ginny and the kids were already asleep. It would provide one more night of procrastinating his apology. He tiptoed up the stairwell, skipping the steps he knew would make the most noise. When he entered the hallway for his room, he noted that Ginny's light was still on.

"Dad?"

Harry glanced to his left. Albus stood in the doorway, yawning. Had he stayed up just to see if his father would return this evening? Harry ruffled his son's black hair and picked him up in a swift embrace to carry him back into his room.

"Were you waiting for me, son?" Harry asked, placing Albus back on the bed.

Albus nodded as he climbed beneath his covers again. "I wanted to talk to you."

"I'm back now, Al, what's on your mind?"

He yawned again. "Mum told us the story of the Deathly Hallows tonight," he said. Harry grimaced, wishing he had been the one to tell his children, or at least do it together with Ginny. Albus continued, "And James wanted the wand..."

"Typical James," Harry remarked.

"And Lily and I both said we wanted the Cloak..."

"Wise choice," Harry replied.

Albus was quiet and Harry looked at him inquisitively. He averted his eyes from his father and looked towards the window. The stars were bright this evening now that the storm had finally departed. He looked back at Harry and said, "I lied though."

"What do you mean?"

"I know the Cloak is the right answer," Albus admitted, "but I really wanted to say the Stone..." Albus's voice was trembling. "I just want to meet them all... Grandma and Grandpa Potter... Uncle Fred... and if they came back, you wouldn't be so sad around this time..."

Harry's heart broke for his son. In looks, Albus was his little Polyjuice clone, but it was much deeper than appearance. It was their personalities that were identical. Harry should have never doubted what Albus would have chosen when he considered the story of the Hallows. He had fooled himself to believe that his youngest son would choose the appropriate magical object.

"Are you and Mum going to be okay?" Albus asked.

"Of course we are," Harry whispered, kissing his son on the forehead. "Don't worry about, Son. You don't have to fix anything. Leave it up to your dear, old Dad." He stood up. "Now get back to sleep."

As Harry shut the door quietly, he turned around. Ginny was standing in the hallway, hands on her hips, and expecting an apology.

"I'm sorry, Ginny," Harry said, avoiding her gaze. If he looked back up at her, she would know what was dancing in his head. She would know that something had broken in his mind from the last conversation with his son.

"You're forgiven," she said softly, "but that doesn't change what you said." She took his hand in her own and squeezed. "Maybe you need some sort of help... you experienced so much pain and abuse when you were growing up... you lost so many people you care about... That's a lot to handle before you're eighteen." She cupped his chin in her hand and forced him to look at her. "Maybe you should finally do something about it."

Harry nodded. "That's why I came back tonight," he said. "I swear to you that I'll do something about it." Deep down, he knew she didn't mean anything other than professional help. Harry tried not to reveal the pain in his eyes. "But it's not for me," he said, "it's for you, Gin."

Less than an hour later, Harry stood outside the Department of Mysteries door. He couldn't shake that look Ginny had given him before he left the house. It was a look of desire and raw need, as if it was going to be the last time they ever saw each other. The lustful look led to a kiss more passionate and obsessive than they ever had before. He could still taste her.

Since Harry led Dumbledore's Army so easily into the Department years earlier, they had upgraded security. No one could enter unless they had clearance. Even as the head of the Aurors, Harry wasn't granted entry into it. Despite this, when he approached the door, it opened. After he stepped inside the room, the door shut automatically. The lights dimmed for several seconds, and when they returned, he was in a laboratory of some kind. Large black cauldrons bubbled, misting the room. Stacks of books were piled on shelves and strewn about on tables and chairs. Vials of liquids were placed in any available space.

"You're right on time, Harry Potter!"

Harry looked through the misty room and saw the man he seen almost twenty-four hours previously. He was still cloaked and hooded, hiding his face with strands of hair, but he was unmistakably the same person.

"I'm sure you have plenty of questions," William said, motioning for Harry to come closer. As Harry maneuvered his way around the packed room, William asked, "What is it first, huh? The photo? The book?"

"Are you the William Emmett Cronus that died in 1776?" Harry blurted out.

"Ah yes, the time travel you're wondering about, yes?" William replied. He motioned for Harry to sit down when he finally came to him, but the seat was occupied by several books. William flicked his wand and the books were shoved violently off the chair. "Am I that same Cronus? HA! It matters not. What does matter, oh yes, is that you are here and I am, too."

Harry sat down on the seat and shook his head. "If you sent the book to Hermione and placed the photograph in the apartment, how did you know your plan would work? That I'd figure it out and find you?"

"It is what I would have done," William answered, poking himself hard in the chest. "You and I are much alike, yes, yes, and that is why you are here. Because you want to save not only the world, but those you love as well. Now when you drink the potion-

"Wait," Harry said, holding up his hands. "I didn't agree to anything."

"You're here, aren't you?" William replied as a violent cough rocked his body. He slammed his fist against the table, knocking over a small vial of bluish liquid. William ignored the spilled mess when he recovered. "I'd be insulted if you were just stopping by without a nice cup of tea!" He laughed manically, stood up, and stirred a cauldron.

Harry was silent as he peered into the cauldron. He thought the clear liquid resembled tea in no way.

"What is it they say?" William asked, stirring quickly. "Double, double, toil and trouble?" He stopped, looked at Harry, and smiled.

Uneasily, Harry gulped. "Cronus, I don't understand any of this."

"And you expect me to educate you?" William replied, clasping his hands together and rubbing them back and forth. "Lesson one, Teddy Lupin. Lesson two, Albus Potter..." He paused for effect. "Lesson three, Ginny Weasley..."

Harry thought at first he was threatening him, and then he realized that those were the three people he had spoken to that had broken his heart with their pain.

"You sit there like you haven't already made your decision," William croaked, in a whisper, "but you have, you have. You're going to do this. Not because you miss them, but because you care so much for everyone else, the survivors who have been left behind and miserable because their lives are ruined. You're going to do this because, deep down, *you know* it's your fault."

"It's not my fault," Harry whispered back.

"Bah!" William shouted, grabbing a vial of green liquid and throwing it against the wall, shattering it. Harry was afraid of what might happen if he really snapped. "You don't believe that! And just as much as you believe it's your fault, you believe it's your responsibility to rectify your mistakes. To fix the past. To make Ginny happy again."

Harry was weakened by how this man was able to read him. He knew exactly what to say to convince him. It was true, Harry felt it was his fault and he felt he had to at least try to make the present a little bit better. Why would it be considered wrong if he saved one of the people that died? How could that be so immoral?

"If I agree," Harry started, "how would I do this?"

"That is the question, isn't it?" William said, laughing. "How far back are you suggesting? One day?" he asked, dipping the ladle into the clear potion and showing him a miniscule amount. "A year?" He dipped again and revealed a larger amount.



Harry really hadn't put a lot of thought into it, hoping the lack of thought would place the decision elsewhere. "I don't know," Harry admitted.

"Of course not," William said, dropping the ladle back inside the potion. "So let's see, who is it that you would like to save?"

Plenty of deceased faces came to the forefront of his mind, but the prominent people he saw were still alive. It was Teddy and Ginny that haunted his mind, how Teddy had grown up without parents, how Ginny had lost her brother. He answered, "Fred, Remus, and Tonks..."

"You're thinking on small scale!" William shouted. "You can't stop a damn battle by going *to* the battle! That's the best way to get yourself killed!"

Harry frowned. "Dumbledore then?"

"Yes, yes," William croaked. "Now you're thinking along the right lines. But why stop there?"

"Sirius," Harry replied, but suddenly felt selfish, but then a thought hit him. "Or Cedric... I could stop Voldemort from coming back... that would save everybody, wouldn't it?" He felt like a child, eagerly asking questions.

William nodded, studying Harry's face through the shadow of his hood. "Come now, you are being far too modest. If you're going to do this, at least do it all the way. I know of two people you have failed to mention that defied Voldemort three times and have the capacity to destroy him. Is there not *anyone* else you want to save?"

Harry gulped. "Mum and Dad?"

William cackled, scooping four ladles full of the clear potion into a large vial. "Halloween night it is!" William shoved the vial into Harry's hands and Harry held it tight. "Good luck, you! Now drink, drink, and you might be home before tea time tomorrow."

Harry glared down at the potion, considering his options. What was this the sensible thing to do? The clear liquid bubbled and popped, splashing his nose with a droplet. He thought of Teddy, of Albus, of that woman at the ceremony in so much pain, and of Ginny... his sweet loving Ginny. As his second thoughts dissolved, Cronus's voice echoed in his ear.

"Drink," he croaked. "Drink!"

He held up the vial in a silent toast. *For Ginny*, he thought, ignoring the feelings of dread and doom inhibiting his mind.

And without another moment's hesitation, Harry pressed the edge to his lips, lifted the vial at an angle, and let the warming liquid cascade into his body.

*Time is free, but it's priceless.  
You can't own it, but you can use it.  
You can't keep it, but you can spend it.  
Once you've lost it, you can never get it back.*

*-Harvey MacKay*

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## **Chapter Four**

### **The Time Traveler**

The feeling was unlike anything Harry had ever experienced, but it also carried a familiar vibe. If he had to compare it to something, he would have likened it to Apparition, being uncomfortably pulled from one destination to another. Yet that could not fully explain the peculiarity of it all. He was everywhere and yet nowhere at the same time.

Harry could see nothing; darkness was all around him. He wasn't sure if he was asleep, dead, or out of existence altogether, and though he could not see or hear or even feel that time was passing by him, he *knew* it was. Although if someone asked him how he knew, Harry would not have been able to explain properly.

Harry wished he would have asked more questions about what to expect once he was fully in the past. He didn't have the slightest idea of where and when he would end up, what exactly he was supposed to do to save his parents, and how long he had before he would have to return. When the potion wore off, would he have to find more in order to return home?

He swore, not out loud, but in his mind, because he couldn't be sure if he still had a voice at this moment. He had been so wrapped up in the possibility of what Cronus was suggesting. He was so preoccupied with the feelings of guilt that he didn't think to ask the essential questions needed to survive. But wasn't that like him? Wasn't that the same attitude that had killed Sirius?

Each new question led to other questions and he settled finally on perhaps the most important issue of them all. Why was William Cronus so eager to help him? At the time, Harry had not bothered to bring it up. The idea of saving everyone took such a grip on his senses that nothing else really mattered. Now that he was traveling through a perpetual existence of obscurity, the reasons started to gain some significance.

As if no transition was needed, Harry was laying face down on a cold stone floor. He had no recollection of stopping, just *being*. No warning of the oncoming scene had been given, no gradual change from darkness to light, no shift from what was known before to what was known now. The same as he knew that time had been moving, he knew that time had stopped its backwards motion and was progressing forward again.

"There are things here in the Department of Mysteries that would tempt normal men," said an unfamiliar voice. "Unless you are sure about You-Know-Who's movement, I do not want to waste my time guarding a prophecy."

"Minister," came the familiar voice of Albus Dumbledore, "if I could reveal my sources without jeopardizing their safety, I would let you know. For the time being, you will have to trust me."

"I trust you impeccably," the Minister said. "If you truly believe You-Know-Who wants this prophecy, who am I to argue? I just wish you would tell me how you know all this."

"I have my ways," Dumbledore answered, "but to reveal that would break a sacred trust. Voldemort did not hear the full prophecy and he may not act before he does. You of all people should know that he has a habit of getting what he wants."

Harry listened intently. It's not as if he had much of a choice, he couldn't move from where he was, *wherever* he was. All he could tell was that he was lying on a floor, assuming he was out of sight or not yet fully materialized into the world.

"But what makes you think he will act soon?"

Dumbledore sighed. "With Rose and Victor Evans murdered, there is no one else that Voldemort can use to lure the Potters away. The exception, of course, will be the Dursleys, whom Voldemort is currently unaware even exist."

"Until more information is passed through the traitor?"

A heavy silence passed between them. "Millicent, I feel the same regrets and helplessness that you feel," Dumbledore said quietly, "but I promise you that this will soon be over."

"You believe then that the Potter boy is the same child the prophecy speaks of?"

"It does not matter what I believe," Dumbledore answered. "Voldemort believes it, and that is all that requires this prophecy to be fulfilled. Whether or not Harry can stop him will hopefully never be a burden he has to be aware of. If I am quick, I may be able to stop Voldemort myself."

"What do you mean?"

"James believes he has discovered something extraordinary," Dumbledore answered. "If he and I can fit the pieces of the puzzle together, Voldemort will be finished. In fact, I will be visiting the Potters later tonight to discuss our plans."

"I thought they weren't allowing anyone, even *you*, to meet their Secret-Keeper." There was a pause and Millicent went on. "I see, James delivered this to you earlier, I presume."

"And their Secret-Keeper remains anonymous."

"Dumbledore, if you don't mind, I have a meeting upstairs. Care to walk with me?"

Their voices became softer and softer until Harry could hear them no more. Harry laid there for several more minutes before he could feel tingling in his body. He could finally move his fingers and toes, then his arms and legs, until every little part of him was back to normal. He shook off the tingling and stood up. He was hidden behind a desk. To

his left, the familiar door to the Hall of Prophecies. To his right, the exit.

He stepped from behind the desk, running the conversation between Dumbledore and the Minister over in his head. If he had heard them correctly, Voldemort had been trying to lure the Potters out of the house by killing his grandparents. It made him wonder how many more relatives had been murdered at the hand of the Dark Lord?

If the other parts of the conversation were interpreted correctly, his father had information to pass to Dumbledore, a way to stop Voldemort. The survival of his parents was looking more and more like a necessity. If, by the slim chance of fate, his parents were aware of Voldemort's Horcruxes, Voldemort would be defeated for good. Not to mention that the Secret-Keeper Wormtail would meet justice for being the spy, and Sirius would live...

And more and more implications of his Mum and Dad's survival were brought to life. If they lived, everyone else lived... the idea gave him strength...

He looked down, seeing a piece of paper sitting on the floor. He bent down and picked it up. Written in sloppy handwriting was the address for where his parents and past-self were hiding. Dumbledore must have dropped it. It was uncharacteristic of his Headmaster to be so clumsy. Had Harry's mere arrival in this time period already have an impact? He pocketed the address.

When he looked up, the door swung open. Harry had no time to hide. Instead he stood there as a younger Arthur Weasley popped in. Arthur reeled back in surprise and then calmed down.

"James?" Arthur asked, looking strangely at him. "I almost didn't recognize you. What did you do to your eyes?"

"My what?" Harry asked, reaching up and touching his glasses. Arthur was mistaking him for his father. Harry knew that Arthur and James knew each other at this time, but he was unaware of the kind of relationship they shared. "Er... Harry got a hold of my wand... changed my eye color..."

“He gave you a wicked looking scratch, too,” Arthur went on, pointing to Harry’s forehead. “You better keep an eye on that kid or else he’s going to wind up with the same mark.” He laughed heartily. He clapped Harry on the back. “Will you let Lily know that Molly and I send our condolences?”

“Your condolences...?” Harry repeated, suddenly remembering that Lily’s parents had just been murdered. “Yes, I will.”

“We know what it’s like,” Arthur said. “Fabian and Gideon were fine men and great assets to the Order, I’m sure. It’s been a rough year for everyone.”

“Yeah, it has,” Harry answered, trying to play along. “So, Arthur, when are you going to join the Order. We could use competent men like yourself.”

Arthur shook his head. “I’m happy to do this small-scale Ministry job,” he replied. “I couldn’t leave Molly and the children alone right now. Hey!” Arthur held up his finger and reached into his pocket, extracting a small booklet. “You haven’t seen a picture of our latest yet, have you? Merlin, it’s been two months!”

Arthur opened the booklet and an infant dressed in pink and displaying fiery red hair sat in her crib. “First female Weasley born in seven generations, can you imagine? She’s got Molly’s eyes.”

Harry took the photo in his hands and grinned at the small child that would eventually be his wife. “What did you name her?”

“Ginevra Molly, but we’ve been calling her Ginny,” Arthur answered proudly, taking the photo back. “You know what, when it’s safe again, you should bring Harry over to meet Ron and her. I bet they’ll get along wonderfully.”

Harry smiled. “I’ll be sure to keep that in mind, Mr. Weasley.”

“Mister?” Arthur repeated. “James, I know we aren’t that close, but there’s no need to call me mister.”

Harry apologized and then looked up at the clock. If he didn't get to Godric's Hollow soon, he would miss Voldemort and fail in stopping him. He said goodbye to Arthur and hurried out of the Department, wondering how in the world he was going to catch the darkest wizard in the world off guard.



Sow a thought, and you reap an act;  
Sow an act, and you reap a habit;  
Sow a habit, and you reap a character;  
Sow a character, and you reap a destiny

-Charles Reade

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**Author Notes:** In order to not get confused, baby Harry in the following chapters will be called "past-Harry."

## Chapter Five

### Homecoming

Harry Apparated with a crack in front of his childhood Godric's Hollow home. He quickly slipped out of sight into the shadow of a large tree. He checked the time and realized he had more to spare than he had originally thought. The October air moved through his hair, spread his bangs, and he felt the cool wind touch his scar.

He almost expected the fading mark to prickle in a world where Voldemort was still alive, but it couldn't. He was no longer a Horcrux, no longer connected to the Dark Lord. He was thankful for it, and he would never have to be a Horcrux if things went as planned tonight.

But what was the plan? Once again, Harry wished there had been more time to consider it, but he was not so fortunate. The moment was coming swiftly whether he was prepared or not. The best he could figure, his main objective, was to get Voldemort as far as possible from Godric's Hollow. Once that was accomplished, he would worry about the rest, such as staying alive and capturing Voldemort.

Another question joined the long list he already had. How *would* he manage to survive? On every other occasion he had faced his enemy, some kind of assistance had always come. His mother's protection helped more time than he could count, there had been Fawkes in the Chamber, Dumbledore, even his own wand had aided his victory. He had to face it: sheer dumb luck and convenient coincidences had

been a huge part of his success. But tonight, what could possibly come to his rescue?

Harry was jolted out of his thoughts by the sound of the door opening. From the concealment of his hiding place, Harry looked towards the entrance and what he saw made his blood boil.

Wormtail was standing in the doorway, illuminated by the light from the house, and was holding Harry's past-self. The infant giggled loudly as James and Lily appeared in the frame behind him.

"Hey, Snitch," James called to his son, "let go of Wormtail's finger. You're going to rip it off." James worked on prying past-Harry's tiny grip apart.

"Wormy!" past-Harry cooed.

Lily reached for her child and Wormtail gladly handed him back to her. "Thanks for checking up on us, Peter," Lily said. "Are you sure you can't stay any longer?"

"No, there are things I have to do," Wormtail replied, a slight tremble in his voice.

"Say goodnight to Wormtail, Harry," James said.

Past-Harry waved playfully to the man who had betrayed them. "Bye, Wormy!" James and Lily both shared an affectionate laugh, bid their Secret-Keeper goodnight, and closed the door behind Wormtail.

Wormtail took several nervous steps away from the door, glanced back at the house, and stopped. He rolled up his sleeve, revealing the Dark Mark. He pulled his wand from his pocket and whispered, "It's time." As he pressed the tip of his wand against the mark, he gasped.

Harry realized he might have missed his moment. If Wormtail had not called his master, Voldemort would not have come. Then again, this was the one of the only times he would know exactly where Voldemort would be. It didn't matter anymore because Wormtail had begun his transformation into his horrid rat form.

Had Wormtail been here this evening in the original timeline? Surely he had, Harry concluded, because Harry's presence could not have affected anything major yet. Perhaps it was Wormtail who later retrieved Voldemort's wand, maybe even assisted the decrepit spectral form of his master when the killing curse destroyed his body.

The curtain, which had been closed before, was pulled open. James, holding past-Harry, stood at the window. With his free hand, he lifted the window up. He pointed into the sky and asked, "Harry, do you remember what that star is called?"

Harry shifted in his hiding place to get a better look at the scene, snapping a twig in the process. James didn't notice, but past-Harry's attention turned towards the noise. He stared curiously towards the sound, not even bothering to pretend to listen to his father.

When his son didn't answer, James responded, "Come on, Snitch. I taught you this yesterday. The dog star. Your godfather was named after it." He patted his son on the head.

Harry could feel the emotion rise up inside of him. How many more moments like this would be possible if he saved his parents tonight? He would be a happy infant and be treated with humanity, as opposed to being abused with the Dursleys. "It's worth it," Harry whispered.

"You know," James said, trying to capture his son's attention again, "some people say our destinies are written up there, in the stars..."

"James," Lily's voice floated out the window, "you know he doesn't like that fortune-telling mumble-jumble."

"He should at least learn it, Lily. Isn't that fortune-telling mumble-jumble what got us here in the first place?"

"Not to mention, it's chilly outside," Lily countered. "I don't want him catching a cold. Why don't you close the window and show him that smoke and wand trick again. He likes that."

"Hi, Harry!" past-Harry called out in almost unintelligible speak.

Harry backed further into the shadows as James laughed. "Smoke and wand trick it is," he said, pulling the window down and sitting with his son on the sofa. When James began puffing the smoke with his wand, past-Harry began laughing.

Harry would have gotten lost in the tender scene if he didn't suddenly remember how close Voldemort would be by now. He scanned the sidewalk, looking from left to right, trying to recall which way Voldemort had come. He didn't want to allow his enemy so close to the home-base, but it might not make much of a difference. He still had the element of surprise. It might not buy him much time, but it might be just enough. After all, Voldemort had used the same tactic when he made his homicidal house call. Harry was sure that if his parents had been prepared, they would have survived.

The Autumn chill sent shivers through him as he waited. He dared not move for fear he wouldn't hear the approaching footsteps of the assassin. A few leaves dropped slowly from the branches. The red and orange of the Fall-change settled on the pavement and steadily moved across the ground.

As Harry observed them, he saw long, black fabric sweep across his line of sight. He stifled a noise of recognition. Voldemort paused at the gate and peered inside towards James and past-Harry. The man had already become incredibly distorted. With his hand on the gate, Voldemort pressed on.

Harry took his chance. Only three steps were between him and Voldemort. The creak of the gate drowned out the sound of his feet slapping the pavement. Voldemort turned just as Harry was upon him. He grabbed the Dark Lord in a tight embrace and Disapparated away from Godric's Hollow, leaving the unsuspecting Potter family happy and content in their ignorance.

*Light thinks it travels faster than anything but it is wrong. No matter how fast light travels, it finds the darkness has always got there first, and is waiting for it.*

*-Terry Pratchett*

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**Author Notes:** *In reality, Antonin Dolohov was the murderer in the following chapter instead of Lord Voldemort.*

## **Chapter Six**

### **Changing Time**

Harry was grateful that Apparation was relatively instantaneous. He would not have enjoyed a prolonged trip in such closed quarters with the man who had hunted him down for seventeen years. When Harry and Voldemort landed hard in front of the Ministry of Magic, Harry quickly had his wand pointed at the dark wizard.

“Stand up, Voldemort.”

With his wand pointed back at Harry, Voldemort rose to his feet gracefully. He stared at Harry with rage, but upon seeing his face, the expression quickly dissolved into one of bewilderment. Whatever Voldemort was expecting, this was certainly not it.

“Potter?” Voldemort spat. “What an interesting turn of events. I was going to enjoy catching you unaware. I must say that I enjoy a good duel instead.”

They circled each other, wands at the ready, the sound of the city echoing between them. Several children across the street laughed playfully, pointing towards them, and remarking about the costumes. Soon, they had moved on.

“Tell me, James Potter, are you really planning on stopping me?”

“I’ve already done it once,” Harry muttered.

"You call the last time we met a victory?" Voldemort hissed, a malicious smile spreading across his thin lips. "You would be dead if not for Dumbledore. Where is he tonight? Waiting for the right moment to save your life?"

Harry gripped his wand tightly. "It's just me."

"Good," Voldemort concluded. "After I kill you, your precious son and wife will be next."

"You don't know the lengths I'll go to make sure that never happens," Harry said. "It doesn't matter if you kill me here, you will die tonight."

"Such confidence, Potter," Voldemort sneered. "Do you really think I care that you have figured out my secrets? Soon you will be dead and my secrets die with you."

Voldemort stopped, and Harry, as well. Harry felt the familiarity of the scene. It had happened before for him so many years ago, and it would happen for the first time for Voldemort, so many years in the future. At least, that was the original timeline, Harry thought. *Not going to happen this time.* And before the curse was uttered, Harry was ready.

*"Avada Kedavra!"*

*"Expelliarmus!"*

As Harry hoped, the red from his wand met the green from Voldemort's wand. Suddenly, Harry's wand was vibrating violently. The connection spewed a golden thread of light between them, knocking each person around aggressively.

"JAMES?"

Harry turned his head to the left. Arthur and Molly were exiting the Ministry, and in the arms of Molly was Ginny. Harry swore and realized how much danger his future family was in. Molly looked on in horror.

“Arthur!” Harry called, holding onto his wand for dear life. He wanted to say this before the connection created the golden dome and blocked him away. “In my right pocket, there’s an address. Get there and warn my family!”

Arthur advanced quickly and rummaged through the pockets. He extracted the secret address. When Arthur was safely away, Harry gritted his teeth as the vibration intensified.

“AND GET GINNY THE HELL AWAY FROM HERE!”

The golden beam splintered, sending smaller beams high over the two duelers. The golden dome-shaped web Harry remembered vividly from his fourth year formed quickly around them.

“What spell is this, Potter?” Voldemort screamed, his red eyes dancing all around in confusion. The song of the phoenix began to play and Voldemort scanned the scene even faster.

Harry didn’t answer. When he saw the beads of light had finally formed, Harry prepared himself. With all his will power, he forced the beads forward on the connection towards Voldemort. As the ball of light touched Voldemort’s wand, echoes of pain emanated from the magical stick.

As Harry expected, grayish forms began to pour from his enemy’s wand. The forms of many victims floated all around, though Harry didn’t recognize anyone. They created a smoky aura between him and Voldemort.

“*Harry,*” the echoes called.

Two shadowy figures were dispelled from Voldemort’s wand. They lingered on the ground and then wisped through the air, settling themselves on either side of Harry. He looked back and forth between the two, left to right, and felt like they resembled the Weasley twins.

“Check it out, Fabian, the rumors are true,” the first one said.

"I see, I see, Gideon," Fabian replied. "Harry Potter is trying to change time."

"Your intentions are noble," Gideon replied.

"But you must stop this journey," Fabian said. "Destiny is a tricky subject to tackle. It will play out, no matter what you do."

"But..." Harry cried, trying to plead with them, "...I've got to save them..."

"Only the events that have already happened can possibly bring peace," Gideon said.

"But my parents knew!" Harry shouted, pleading. "They knew about the Horcruxes..."

The golden dome fell away, the webbing shattered. The shadows of the departed broke and mist was all that was present. Voldemort had broken the connection. Harry collapsed upon the pavement. His knuckles were white and his chest heaved up and down heavily.

"James."

Someone was shaking him and calling him by his father's name. He opened his eyes and stared into the face of Arthur. How much time had passed? He sat up, seeing the lingering remnants of the fog. It had only been a few minutes.

Harry sat up. "Where's Voldemort?" he asked.

"He fled," Arthur said. "James, what's happening? I could have sworn I just saw Gideon and Fabian."

Harry held his head and rubbed his temples. "Arthur, aren't you supposed to be at Godric's Hollow?"

Arthur helped Harry to his feet. "I sent Molly and stayed to help you. I'm sorry, but none of my spells-

"You WHAT?"



Harry pushed Arthur away, sending the man backwards. Harry swore and thought wildly. Would Voldemort return straightaway to Godric's Hollow to finish the job? And what if Molly and Ginny were there when he returned? He trembled as he thought about it. He didn't waste another second to find out. He flexed his hand, gripped his wand, and Apparated away from the Ministry of Magic.

At the exact moment he appeared at Godric's Hollow, he saw the back of a redheaded witch Disapparate. *Thank God*, he thought. Molly had successfully warned his parents and she and Ginny were safely away from the house.

There was a loud crash. Harry tensed as he slowly turned towards the house, praying it wasn't what he thought it was.

"Lily, get the kids!" James screamed. "It's him! Go! Run! I'll hold him off!"

Harry raced towards the house. He hadn't stopped *anything*, he had merely delayed the inevitable. He heard the killing curse shouted, saw the flash of green, and heard the collapse of a body. Harry shrieked in a way he had never heard himself shriek before.

*Not Dad!* he thought. With his failed attempts to rescue his father, his thoughts immediately focused on his Mum. *I need to get to her...*

He tripped. Harry hid the walkway hard, slamming his chin against the ground. He tasted blood. As he stood up, he ignored the pain and found himself facing Wormtail.

"Out of my way, you bastard!" Harry shouted, raising his wand and sending the stunning spell. Wormtail barely had enough time to look confused before he conjured a shield charm. Harry screamed wickedly, his blood reaching the boiling point. He wanted so badly to kill this vile rodent right now.

Lily screamed. Harry looked up towards the second floor where the light was shining through the window. His Mum was barricading the door in feeble attempts to protect her son.

“Wormtail, look!” Harry screamed, pointing towards the window. “He’s going to kill Lily! Damn it, I said, look!”

Wormtail trembled and wearily looked towards the window. Lily was standing with her arms wide open, trying to protect her son. The door burst open and Voldemort entered the room.

“H-he said he wouldn’t kill them...” Wormtail sobbed, “only the b-boy...”

“Tell that to my father in there,” Harry screamed.

Wormtail looked strangely at Harry and then lowered the shield charm. Harry shouted the stunning spell. It hit Wormtail straight in the chest and sent him back brutally into a hedge.

Harry rushed into the house as fast as his legs could take him. He jumped over the lifeless body of his father, his heart beating faster than it had ever beaten before. He ascended the stairs, each step leading him closer to his mother. *I’m coming*, he thought desperately.

“Step aside!” came the strong voice of Voldemort. “Stand aside, girl!”

He didn’t see the flash of green. He simply heard her hit the floor and he wasn’t even on the second story yet. “NO!” Harry shrieked, slamming his fist against the wall as he took another step. He had been too late. He had failed.

There was a tremendous explosion that rocked the house. Harry fell against the wall, almost tumbling down the stairs. His face hit the railing, breaking it as he collided, and he tasted even more blood. The explosion had left a ringing in his ears. Every sound was echoed and far away. Gathering himself, Harry knew what happened next and he’d be damned if he was going to fail at something else.

He rushed into the room, dust was floating everywhere, and the nighttime sky peered into the wreckage. Harry saw the crib, and then he saw an orb of light floating precariously close to it. He knew, he *knew* without any kind of doubt, that it was the piece of Voldemort’s soul. It was strange how peaceful it appeared as it hovered above past-Harry.

Harry screamed out and flung himself towards the crib. Past-Harry was barely conscious, but Harry still heard the muffled infant's cries as he scooped him up in his arms. He bolted from the room, examining the child. The scar where the curse had backfired was etched freshly into the forehead.

He exited the house, still shaken from his failure to save his parents, but ecstatic that he had spared his role as a Horcrux. There would be no more nightmares, no more isolation, no more worrying...

In the street, he saw a tall burly man in the moonlight. "Hagrid!" Harry called out desperately. He rushed towards him.

"James?" Hagrid called out. "What the bloody hell is goin' on? What's this about Yeh-Know-Who?" He looked up at the house and gasped. "Where's Lily?"

"Lily?" Harry mumbled, limping closer to Hagrid. Past-Harry began to cry loudly, as if he was aware that he had just been orphaned. "Hagrid, Lily is... she's..."

"No," Hagrid replied, cutting him off. "She can't be. Dumbledore jus' got the message from Molly. I'm supposed ter bring the kids away so you and Lily can sort this mess out."

Harry buckled to his knees, the child still crying in his arms.

"James, maybe yeh better let meh have Harry..."

"NO!" Harry shouted, wrenching away from Hagrid's advancing arms. "Did you say kids?" When Hagrid simply looked at him strangely, Harry shouted, "Answer me!"

Hagrid recoiled at the harshness of the tone. "James, yeh were here when Molly left the wee one, weren't yeh?"

Harry slowly handed past-Harry into Hagrid's brawny arms. He backed away clumsily from the half-giant, who stood there with a bewildered expression. Harry shook with worry and then bolted back towards the house. He threw open the gate, tearing it from its hinges, and rushed up the walkway.

Step by step, he prayed. Ginny had to be okay. She had to be. He had never even considered her arrival, had not even anticipated that it would be Molly who came to Godric's Hollow and leave Ginny there. How could he predict a turn of events like that?

He had never told the Weasleys specifically what to warn James and Lily about. Surely when Molly had seen that James was at home and not dueling Voldemort, she had become confused. Maybe James and Lily had even considered that it was another plot to lure them away from the safe house. Had they assumed it was still secure, telling Molly to leave Ginny there because it was the safest place possible while Molly went to find Dumbledore?

"Damn it!" Harry shouted.

He heard crying, and finally understood why it had appeared that that his past-self was crying when he was barely conscious. He hadn't been. It had been another child. He followed the weeping into the same room, scanned the space, and noticed a second crib in the left corner. Its front barrier had been ripped off, exposing the small body of a redheaded little girl.

She was all right. Harry breathed a sigh of relief. She was safe.

And then he saw it.

A small orb of light floating closely above Ginny.

And before Harry could react, he was pulled violently away from existence and thrown unceremoniously through time.

somewhere in this darkness, there's a life that I can't find.

maybe                    it's                    too                    far                    away  
maybe I'm just blind.

now roaming through the darkness, I'm alive but I'm alone

part                    of                    me                    is                    fighting                    this  
part of me is gone.

-3 Doors Down, When I'm Gone

To everything there is a season,  
a time for every purpose under the sun.  
A time to be born and a time to die;  
a time to plant and a time to pluck up that which is planted;  
a time to kill and a time to heal ...  
a time to weep and a time to laugh;  
a time to mourn and a time to dance ...  
a time to embrace and a time to refrain from embracing;  
a time to lose and a time to seek;  
a time to rend and a time to sew;  
a time to keep silent and a time to speak;  
a time to love and a time to hate;  
a time for war and a time for peace.

-Ecclesiastes 3:1-8

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*Great Scott!*

*-Emmett Brown, Back to the Future*

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## **Chapter Seven**

### **Back to the Future**

Harry Potter awoke.

As if he had been asleep for years, all sensation began returning to him and he was more aware of himself than he had ever been. He felt it first upon his cheek, realizing how cold his face was, and concluded it must be a breeze. He felt it next upon his body, realizing how warm his back was, and concluded it must be the sun.

He opened his eyes.

Directly in his line of sight was the same crib he had been forcibly taken from, but his reason for wanting to be near it was gone. No child was inside, no baby girl crying, no Ginny lying there alone and

helpless. All that remained was the broken bars of the crib and the build-up of grime and dust from the years passed.

His face was pressed against the hard wooden floor. He lifted himself to a sitting position, feeling the specks of dirt fastened to his face and the stickiness of his cheeks. He had been crying before he left. He must have been crying for almost four decades. No wonder he felt like he did.

He stood, staring at the place where the infant Ginny had been. He could still see, as vivid as the reality he was part of now, the orb of light wandering so close to his Ginny. He stepped closer, putting his hands against the aged wood, and tried hard to think about the implications of his interference.

*Had Ginny become the Horc-*

*NO*, he thought, blocking out the process. If he asked the question, it would make it true. Yes, he had failed utterly and miserably, failed in stopping Voldemort, failed in rescuing his parents, but he refused to address his failure with Ginny Weasley.

He fought back every urge to lose himself, but he concluded that he had to deal with the situation. If Ginny really had fused with the piece of Voldemort's soul, surely the memory of this new timeline would be present in his mind. As he struggled to recall, pain sliced through his head. The only existence he could remember was the previous one. Perhaps his interference was not as disastrous as it seemed. After all, he had never actually *seen* Ginny become the Horcrux.

Yet something was wrong that he couldn't quite place his finger on.

Taking one more glance around the room, he took a deep breath and exited the destroyed space. He wandered through the shadowed hallway, stepping over broken toys. He reached the staircase and saw the broken railing he had fallen against. He took each step down and entered the sitting room, where he almost expected to find his father still dead upon the floor.

He passed through the room and exited the house. The yard was just as Harry remembered it when he and Hermione had visited so long

ago: overgrown with weeds and the magical sign still popping up as Harry passed by it.

Harry heard an animal squeak and he looked towards the gate. A rat scampered beneath a fallen branch. If Harry hadn't known any better, he would have guessed that the rodent was Peter Pettigrew. Harry stopped as he noticed the animal again. It had perched itself relatively out of sight and was peering towards him.

"Wormtail?" Harry shouted.

The rat bolted from its hiding place. Despite the momentary regret that Wormtail seemed to show, the freshness of his betrayal and his own failure gripped Harry's senses. He pulled his wand from his pocket and threw the unhinged gate from the entrance. He rushed in the direction the rat went, followed him through a different gate, but the creature disappeared from sight as soon as Harry entered the yard.

He searched around the ground, but no sign of the rat could be found. Harry frowned and decided ultimately that he was imagining what he had seen. He kicked a stone away and grunted loudly.

"Young man," came an aged female voice. Harry turned his gaze towards the house of the yard he was in and saw a pleasant-looking elderly lady sitting on the front porch. "I wasn't expecting anyone until later this afternoon," she said. "Are you here for the tour?"

Harry frowned again. "Tour?" he repeated.

The woman smiled and pointed next to her. To her left, attached to the door, was a golden plaque emblazoned with silver words: *The House of William Emmett Cronus. Free Tours Daily.*

Harry needed answers, but could it really be that easy? Would Cronus return to the home he spent all his life in? It might be the first place Harry would check if he was living in such a far off distant future. Even if Cronus was not here, Harry was sure some kind of answers would be present. There was no use passing up this sort of opportunity while he was here.



"I'm not here for the tour," Harry admitted, "but I do have questions."

"You're one of those then," the woman said, motioning for Harry to come closer. "We get curious tourists just like you every now and then." She held out her hand to Harry. Harry assisted her in standing up from her chair. "My name is Roberta Sparrow. Come in, please, and I'll answer your questions."

He followed her inside the door. She was not a fast witch as she hobbled slowly inside the room. Harry closed the door behind them. He turned and looked at the room they had entered. It was an eccentric room with fake cauldrons and vials.

"We've been getting a lot more inquiring people since Patricia Pilgrim was here last year researching for her book," Roberta stated. "Where did you hear of Cronus first?"

"That same book," Harry answered.

"Impossible," Roberta replied. "She hasn't even published it yet."

Harry pulled the book from his pocket and took the picture of his family from it. He handed the book to her and pocketed the picture. Roberta stared at it, turning it over and over, trying to discredit it somehow.

"She must have sent you an advanced copy," Roberta muttered, and handed the book back to him. "Never mind that, though. What will it be first?" Roberta asked, summoning a cane and positioning herself up. "The popular question is the Time Potion. Shall I start there?"

Harry shrugged, unsure. He knew that particular detail worked just fine. "What can you tell me about Cronus?" Harry asked. "Did he figure out how to travel through time?"

Roberta nodded. "Of course he did, he invented the Time-Turner, but the real question is if he figured out how to travel *forwards* in time. You see, the Time-Turner..." she motioned towards a wall and Harry saw a replica of the magical object on a shelf. "...can only take you several hours into the past. Nothing too dramatic, but the potion,

Cronus theorized, would send people great distances forwards and backwards.”

“But he never had a chance to make it,” Harry countered, recalling the information from the book. “He was banned from the research and he died before it was legalized again.”

“Did he die?” Roberta asked mischievously. “*Records* show he died in 1776, but it isn’t exactly known when he died. 1776 is simply the last time Cronus was seen alive. He disappeared and didn’t reappear until four years later. But some might say he orchestrated the circumstances himself.”

Harry looked at her strangely. “What do you mean?”

Roberta smiled coyly. “I mean that Cronus was a master at making others believe what he wanted them to believe. If he wished for you to think he was traveling through time, you would believe it. He used to lock himself up in his lab for weeks. No one would see him or talk to him, and he would just reappear as if no time had passed at all. Was he traveling the great boundaries of time? I don’t know.”

Harry nodded, thinking how Cronus had been able to manipulate his feelings and decisions. Harry was convinced the man had taken one of these extended leaves from his time in the 1700s and was visiting the here and now.

Roberta went on. “Yes, Cronus was an unconventional wizard. Aged well beyond his years.” She pointed towards a picture on the wall. It was Cronus, wrinkled with age spots, black hair hanging loosely over his face. He looked close to death. “Cronus was forty-five in this picture.” She waited for Harry’s reaction and then went on. “He even blamed his appearance and personality on time travel.”

Harry studied the picture. The man certainly looked ancient. Barely anymore of the face was visible, but if he could imagine anything behind the hair and hood, the little bit he could see would definitely be this. Roberta hobbled closer. Harry looked at her and asked, “What does traveling through time have to do with it?”

"Imagine that you left your timeline at noon and returned only a second later," Roberta said. "It would be as if no time had passed at all, but you'd be wrong. If you spent three years in the past, you would have aged three years. Not to mention that the body is designed to be living a forward motion under the influence of a normal timeline, not to be ripped to and fro, back and forth. Early studies on house-elves show what prolonged exposure to time traveling can do to the body and mind. Cronus even theorized that too many trips through time could eventually cause someone to be stuck in whatever time they were in."

Harry felt these descriptions matched exactly the man he had been meeting with. "Is it possible that Cronus could be living in this time?"

"Possible, yes," Roberta answered. "In fact, Cronus claimed he had brought back a great wealth of knowledge from the future and he wrote the information as vague prophecies." She hobbled over to a drawer. She opened and pulled out a dusty old book. She thumbed through the pages and set it on the table, next to a black cauldron. "Read this one."

Harry joined her side and picked up the book. In sloppy handwriting, almost faded from the page, Harry read the prophecy out loud. "*The enemy shall be yourself. You will come with lightning and fire and you will slay the many-headed snake.*" When Harry finished, he looked at Roberta questioningly.

"Experts agree he was referring to you, Harry Potter," Roberta answered.

Harry recoiled. He wasn't sure if the woman had recognized him, but that particular piece of information didn't matter. Harry reread the prophecy and realized how much it fit him. The enemy was himself since Voldemort had accidentally placed a soul fragment within him. The lightning referred to his scar and the fire to his wand. And he had killed Voldemort, the heir of Slytherin, who had split himself into many pieces.

"But the tricky thing about prophecies," Roberta started, before Harry could react, "is that most, not all, mind you, but most are vague and

can only be understood *after* the fact.” She took the book back, closed it, and placed it inside the drawer.

“Why, just the other day,” Roberta went on, “It was storming outside, and I was wandering around in the dark. Lightning lit up the room, I saw my reflection, and I cast a fire charm. I ended up destroying my grandson’s toy Hydra. Tell me, did I not just fulfill the prophecy?”

Harry smiled at the woman’s story. “I suppose so, yes.”

“As I said, if Cronus wanted you to believe he was living in the future, you would believe it,” Roberta said. “Now, does that answer your questions, Mr. Potter?”

Harry nodded. There was no doubt in his mind who Cronus was. The two individuals were one and the same. Harry looked up towards the painting, who was now scowling at him.

“Would you mind if I asked you a question?” Roberta asked, and Harry allowed her. “Why are you really here? The potion has never been found, the recipe for it is lost, and yet you still appear on my doorstep, chasing a rat, when you’ve been missing for two months.”

Harry quickly tore his attention from the rest of the room and looked at her. “Did you say I was missing two months? Why didn’t you say anything earlier?”

“A man who disappears for that long and comes here instead of returning to his family doesn’t want to be found,” Roberta asked. “I’m not sure what you’re planning, but whatever it is cannot be worth this kind of difficulty. Go home, Mr. Potter, before you cause some real trouble.”

When Harry exited the house, he could scarcely believe he had been gone for two months. Ginny and the rest of his family must be worried sick that he had not returned home that night. And he had never even told anyone where he was going. He needed to return home as soon as possible. As much as he wanted to visit Cronus again, that might have to wait.

Harry stepped onto the walkway. Harry noticed the same rat staring at him again from the other side of the yard, near the gate. Once again, Harry called out to it. The rat bounded across the street as Harry wildly threw spell after spell, screaming the vermin's name as he ran. Each spell missed.

The rat entered another gate, this time the entrance to the cemetery. Harry stopped, watched the creature run, and aimed carefully. This time the spell connected and the rat tumbled into a tombstone, flopping down on the ground in front of it.

Harry entered the cemetery. When he came upon the rat, he looked up at the tombstone. He shook his head and the coincidence that this was the one he would suddenly find.

<i>William</i>		<i>Emmett</i>		<i>Cronus</i>
<i>July</i>	<i>31,</i>	<i>1610?-October</i>	<i>31,</i>	<i>1776</i>
<i>"To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the</i>				
				<i>heaven...</i>
<i>A time to love, and a time to hate; a time of war, and a time of peace."</i>				

"Cronus," Harry muttered. He would deal with him later. Right now, he had other things on his mind. Harry poked the rat, carefully examining it to confirm who it was. Sure enough, Harry recognized the pattern of fur and noticed the missing finger. It was Wormtail.

Harry revived the rat and kept his wand pointed at him. "I have questions," Harry said forcibly.

Wormtail slowly transformed back into his human state, but from the looks of it, he hadn't been in this form for a long time. On his knees, Wormtail grasped the ends of Harry's clothing. "Please," Wormtail begged, "please, spare me, Harry. Don't kill me."

"You're already supposed to be dead," Harry replied.

"I know," Wormtail cried. Harry wrenched away from his crummy hands. "And I'm thankful every day that you and the Weasley girl spared my life. I've done what you said. I haven't shown my face and-

"

"Shut up!" Harry shouted, and Wormtail closed his mouth abruptly, trembling in fear. "Did you say *Ginny* and I spared you?"

"Yes, yes, and I haven't forgotten."

As Wormtail muttered incoherently, Harry's mind raced. *That* was certainly a change in the time line. Wormtail had died in the last one, and it appeared that Ginny and himself were the ones who had saved him this time around. Harry pointed the wand directly between Wormtail's eyes. "Explain."

"Ah..." Wormtail closed his eyes and whimpered. "The n-night at Malfoy Manor. Greyback brought the f-four of you-"

"Four?" Harry repeated.

"Yes, yes," Wormtail replied. "You and Ron, and Ginny, and that Mudblood..." Harry pressed the wand harder at his usage of the deplorable word. Wormtail whimpered even more. "I was going to kill the girl, but you overpowered me. She convinced you to spare me. You told me to never show my face again. And I haven't, Harry. I've lived these twenty years as a rat."

"Why?" Harry demanded.

"Because I was weak!" Wormtail sobbed. "I deserved nothing less than a life as vermin. I regret it, I regret it. Your parents loved me and they trusted me!" Large tears were falling from his cheeks.

"You regret it?" Harry shouted, flicking his wand. Wormtail flew backwards into Cronus's tombstone. Harry came nose to nose with him. "You had every chance to redeem yourself that night at Godric's Hollow when Voldemort was killing my father. Instead you tried to stop the one person that could end it. And you still went crawling back to him even after he had been defeated."

Wormtail shook. "How can you know that?" he gasped, scanning his face and his eyes. His gaze turned towards the scar. "It was you!" he cried. "All these years, they said it was me."

Harry ignored his realization and pressed the wand further into his forehead. "Explain," Harry demanded again.

"There were two James Potters wandering around that night," Wormtail replied. "Everyone assumed it was Sirius using Polyjuice, trying to lure the Potters away from their house. Once Sirius's name was cleared, it was natural to assume it was me." Wormtail stared at Harry accusingly.

Harry gritted his teeth. "Is Voldemort still dead?"

"You defeated the Dark Lord," Wormtail remarked, "but I know nothing else, except you went missing two months ago. They've been searching for you."

"So I've heard," Harry muttered.

"Harry, is that where you were?" Wormtail asked. "W-what did you change?"

"I don't know," Harry admitted, staring at the name beside Wormtail's head: Cronus. With the recent revelations from Wormtail, Harry changed his mind. Before he returned to his family, he needed to see that man. He would have answers to the questions he couldn't ask his family. "I don't know, but I'm going to find out."

*Destruction cometh; and they shall seek peace, and there shall be none.*

*-Ezekiel 7:25*

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**Author's Notes:** *The timeline was inspired by "The Seventh Horcrux" by Melindaleo*

## **Chapter Eight**

### **Destiny Redefined**

Before Harry left the graveyard, he sent Wormtail away. If the Maurader had been living there for two decades, there really could be no harm in allowing it to continue. Besides, if he had any more questions, he would return and question the rat.

He stepped off the street and onto the sidewalk. After Godric's Hollow, he went to the Ministry in search of Cronus. When he approached the entrance to the Department of Mysteries, the door had not opened for him as it did before. He had to conclude that either Cronus was not part of this timeline or he simply didn't want to see him. Since he hadn't met anyone else there, he came to Grimmauld.

Harry now wearily stood on the street outside 12 Grimmauld Place. In the two months he had been gone, Ginny had really let the place go. The yard was overgrown with bushes and grasses, no wizarding toys littered the ground, and the windows were filled with grime.

As he entered the gate, he noticed someone standing at the front steps, who noticed him at the same time. Harry pulled his wand out and approached cautiously. The stranger came into view. It was Michael Corner, dressed in the traditional Auror uniform, but as Harry came closer, the uniform was not the established dress code. Instead, it was what the Head of the Auror Department would wear... what *Harry* was supposed to be wearing.

"Michael, why are you wearing...?"



Michael didn't give him time to ask the question. He cast a spell in Harry's direction. It narrowly missed him. Upon first mistake, Harry cast a shield around him as Michael charged him, a look of determination on his face.

"Harry, just give it up and come quietly," Michael said, poking the shield with his wand. "The Minister wants you alive."

"Why *wouldn't* Kingsley want me alive?" Harry asked.

"That's right, you've been gone," Michael said, laughing. "There's a new minister now, and he's going to provide peace."

"What happened to Kingsley?" Harry demanded.

"Oh come now," Michael replied. "Did you really think he'd be able to stand up against Dudley in your absence? Kingsley is dead."

Harry's mind raced 100 kilometers a second. Kingsley was dead, but at the hand of Dudley? Surely it wasn't his cousin, he had changed for the better soon after he had returned from hiding. And what was this about Michael, wearing the head Auror robes when that was Harry's position?

The shield broke. Someone from behind wrapped their arms around Harry's neck. They squeezed and no air could reach his lungs. His wand dropped to his feet. Harry struggled as Michael came closer, raising his wand. Harry immediately reacted, using the brick wall of a person to his advantage. He quickly kicked up, knocking Michael over, his wand shooting off a spell.

Harry stood there, holding Michael's wand. The spell from Michael had hit his captor, who turned out to be Cormac McLaggen. They both lay in the front lawn unconscious. Harry threw the extra wand into the bushes and picked his own back up.

He needed to get inside to make sure his family was all right. As he approached the door, no welcome mat was placed on the ground. The door was slightly ajar and Harry slowly pushed it open all the way. The smell of decay greeted his nostrils as he looked inside. He could tell no one had lived there for a very long time.

He calmed what would be a panic attack. There were no familiar friendly portraits of his wife or his kids or his family. On the wall instead were the crude house-elf heads and the sleeping portrait of Mrs. Black. Someone had pulled the tarp across her. As he journeyed into the hallway, he found the decaying skeleton of a house-elf on the wall, positioned upon a set of antlers from a creature he couldn't identify. He guessed it was Kreacher, who had come to die and wanted to be displayed on the wall with the former servants. The smell was intoxicating and Harry tried not to gag.

*So what if there's no one here?* Harry thought. It simply meant that in this new timeline, Harry and his family lived elsewhere.

"Let's check this back room, Ron."

Harry ducked out of sight as he heard the voices. He peaked around the corner into the hallway. Walking away from him, he recognized Ron and Dean, both dressed in their Auror uniforms as well. They walked into the furthest room. Harry followed them quietly and positioned himself outside the room. He wanted to walk in and greet his friends, but the incident outside caused him to pause.

"I didn't think we'd find him here anyhow," Ron said.

There was a sound of a bed shaking. Ron must have sat down on whatever bed was in there.

"I can't really believe that it finally happened," Dean said. "I never thought Dudley would do this. If you are starting up the Order again, I'd like to join."

Ron was hesitant to answer. "I'm not sure what's going on yet," he replied. "It's been so quick. We always feared that he might try something like this, but we didn't think he was capable of it, you know?"

"Is it true Dumbledore suppressed his magical abilities when he was a child?" Dean asked.

"It is," Ron answered, "but that's the only way the Dursleys would even take Harry in." Ron sighed. "And that's what made Dudley snap

when he found out. He killed Vernon and Petunia when they were in hiding.”

Dean whistled unbelievably. “It’s rubbish. Even if we found Harry, I wouldn’t have the heart to bring him in. He was my dorm mate, for Merlin’s sake.”

“He’s my best mate,” Ron added. “I’d sooner help him escape than capture him. I just wish he wouldn’t have run off without...” Ron paused. “What the bloody hell are you doing, Dean?”

“I don’t want to hurt you, Ron. Please, just put your wand on the ground.”

“Have you sold out?” Ron shrieked. “You were just setting me up? I can’t believe it, Dean, after everything we’ve been through.”

“I’m tired of fighting,” Dean admitted. “I lost my whole family in the first two wars. I just want it over with. Dudley is promising peace.”

“You do know what he’s calling himself now, don’t you?”

“Ron, sit down. It’s too late. I’ve made up my mind.”

Ron ignored him. “He’s claiming himself Voldemort, the Dark Lord incarnate, the name of the *same* wizard that is responsible for your family’s deaths!”

“SHUT UP!” Dean bellowed. “If you don’t shut up, I *will* kill you!”

“KILL ME THEN!” Ron shrieked. “I will not go quietly...”

Harry had heard enough to decide that Ron was still one of the good guys. He burst into the room and cast the stunning spell. Dean had no time to even consider what was happening. He was lifted high, slammed into the wall, and fell hard upon a bedside table, smashing it into splinters. Harry stood there and looked at Ron, who appeared baffled and delighted at the same time.

“I had him, you know,” Ron answered. “Just one more second.”

"You're welcome, mate."

Ron grinned wide and embraced his friend. With several pats on the back and a couple good-to-see-you proclamations, they parted and stood in the room, looking at the fallen Dean Thomas.

"So Dudley's the new minister?" Harry asked.

"Without you here, he wasn't afraid to take over."

"And he's calling himself Voldemort?"

"He was always fascinated with the bloke."

"And the Order has reformed, I assume."

"The day after Duddykins took over."

Harry shook his head. He had hoped that the wars were over and peace had finally found them. By interfering with destiny, he had made things far worse than before. As he figured things out, he would have to attempt to change it all back.

"Mione's been on my case to find you," Ron said, interrupting his thoughts.

"Who?" Harry asked.

"Mione, my wife?"

"Oh, *Hermione*," Harry answered. "Since when do you call her Mione?"

Ron gave him a strange look. "When *haven't* I called her Mione?" He knocked on Harry's head, remarking that he must have taken a good blow to it. "Anyway, let's get back to the Burrow. It won't be long before more of Dudley's boys get here."

Harry grabbed his wrist, dreading the answer to the question he was about to ask. "Ron, how's Ginny?"

“Ginny’s fine, she’s been worried sick about you,” Ron answered, pulling Harry towards the exit. “Now hurry up. There’s not much time.”

*In a moment, I knew what had happened. I had slept, and my fire had gone out, and the cold bitterness of death had come over my soul.*

*-The Time Traveler, The Time Machine*

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## **Chapter Nine**

### **Revelation**

Harry and Ron entered the Burrow several minutes later. After the necessary slip of paper was given to Harry, Ron had explained how the property had become the temporary Order of the Phoenix headquarters until they could find somewhere more secure. Although, Ron mused, since the place was protected by the Fidelius Charm, it was as secure as the Secret Keeper was.

“And you know how Mum is,” Ron said. “She won’t leave the house.”

When they entered the kitchen, the aroma of dinner filled their nostrils. The spicy smell of steak and kidney pie greeted them. Molly was turned away from them, hunched over the stove and tending to a dessert. She hummed to herself quietly.

“Mum, there’s someone here to see you,” Ron said.

Molly turned around with a spoon and dropped it immediately. “Harry James Potter!” she cried, silencing the clanging sound of the spoon hitting the floor. She rushed over to him and threw her arms around him. “I should hex you right here for giving us such a terrifying ordeal. Where have you been?”

Harry shook his head. “I’m not entirely sure,” he lied. “The last two months have been a blur.” And that was true. Godric’s Hollow had only been several hours. Where the remaining eight weeks went, he wasn’t sure.

“Well, you’re back, and that’s all that matters,” Molly said. “Oh, I’ll get Arthur out here right away so he can update you.”

"I'd really like to see-" Harry started, but he was cut off by Molly yelling for her husband. He was about to repeat himself when two Weasleys Apparated into the kitchen and made Harry's heart skip a beat.

"Fred?" Harry whispered.

"It's about time you showed up, you scrawny little git," Fred replied as a large smile formed.

Harry's mouth was open wide. He slowly walked towards the twin, poked him in the face, and wrapped his arms around the Weasley. He had managed to do one good thing on his trip, at least, and that was to save Fred Weasley.

"Don't get all sentimental with me, Harry," Fred said. "I'm not the one who everyone thought was dead."

Harry couldn't help but laugh. "Fred," Harry said, "it's good to see you."

"Why does Fred get all the love?" George asked. "You haven't seen me for two months either."

Several witches and wizards entered the kitchen with Arthur leading the procession. Arthur sat at the head of the table. Angelina Johnson took her seat next to Fred. Alicia Spinnet sat next to George. Katie Bell was also there, along with Oliver Wood, Roger Davies, Percy, Minerva McGonnagal, Neville Longbottom, and Luna Lovegood. Harry grinned. It was good to see everybody. He sat down next to Hermione.

"Harry, a lot has happened since you left us," Arthur started. "I should start at the beginning, I suppose, on the day you left. On the night of the Twenty-Year celebration, Kingsley went missing. No note, no goodbye, just gone.

"We wouldn't have thought it was that big of a deal, but you did the same thing that night. You left without saying goodbye. No one knew where you were. A week went by, and then strange things began to happen. Many of the top Ministry officials were acting out of character.

I knew immediately what it was, they were being controlled by the Imperius, but from who?"

"Dudley?" Harry asked.

"That's right," Arthur answered, "but it was too late to act. The officials had already decided it was time to instate an emergency Minister in Kingsley's absence. The unofficial policy is to elect someone from within. But they instated your cousin, and that's when it was obvious who was pulling the strings."

"You're the only one he ever feared," Hermione said. "Without you there to scare him into submission, he acted."

Harry frowned. "What happened to Dudley? I thought he had a change of heart?"

"Are you kidding?" George asked.

"Sorry," Harry replied. "I don't know where I've been these past two months. My memories are not all there. Could someone please back up and tell me what happened with Dudley?"

Arthur sighed. "When You-Know-Who failed to kill you as a child but still left you orphaned, Dumbledore took you to the only family you had left."

"The Dursleys, yes, and they wouldn't take me because Dudley was magical," Harry said, recalling the information he had heard.

"Dudley had showed signs of magical abilities at that young age," Arthur continued. "The Dursleys would only take you if Dumbledore suppressed Dudley's powers."

"He agreed to that?" Harry asked.

"He did," Arthur answered. "When Dumbledore died, the spell he used against Dudley also died. When Dudley found out what Vernon and Petunia had done to him, he snapped. He killed them straightaway. Whether he meant to or not, we still don't know."



"But that was twenty years ago," Harry said.

"Right," Arthur said. "In those two decades, you took Dudley under your wing, taught him the ways of our world, trained him in controlling his magical abilities. But he was always power hungry. He was always fascinated by the Dark Arts."

"And Voldemort?" Harry finished.

Arthur nodded. "A few years ago, Dudley started gathering followers. Nothing too significant, because he never acted, but many people were starting to notice. We noted the similarity between him and You-Know-Who. But you were always there, talking him down, convincing him to give up whatever crazy scheme he had. Once you were gone—"

"He didn't have a reason to stop," Harry whispered.

"We're pretty sure he killed Kingsley," Arthur went on. "As soon as he took over, he began looking for you under the pretense that he wanted his cousin found. I think he just wanted to make sure you were really gone for good."

"And this thing about calling himself Voldemort?" Harry asked. "Wouldn't that alert people that he's bad news?"

"He's using the fear of the old times to manipulate everyone now," Arthur answered. "Why create a new legacy when there's one already that people are terrified of? Who was to say he wasn't You-Know-Who reincarnated in a different body? *You* were gone. That confirmed his words to many different people."

"So what do we do?" Harry asked. "Who's in charge?"

Arthur raised his hand. "I am," he replied. "But now that you've returned, you're back in charge, Harry. Dudley doesn't fear us. It's you he's frightened of."

Harry leaned back in his chair. The smell of dinner once again wafted into his nostrils. He closed his eyes and enjoyed the smell, trying to take all the information in and decide what his first course of action would be. He sighed, letting his mind wander to the steak and kidney

pie Ginny had made him several days before he went back in time.  
*Ginny...*

Harry opened his eyes. "Where's Ginny?" he asked.

Fred pointed outside. "She's with Rose and Hugo, I think."

Harry pushed his chair back from the table. He wasn't going to do anything until he saw his wife. He stood up and journeyed to the back door. As he opened it, he saw the small bodies of Hugo and Rose throwing an enchanted ball back and forth with each other. Then, a blur as a redheaded witch raced by on a broom, calling, "HARRY!"

Harry stepped off the porch, and stopped as he noticed where Fred's tombstone should have been. There was an extra one sitting beside it, and then he thought of the Weasleys he did not see inside. *Charlie and Bill*. His heart sank and tears began to well up inside his eyes.

He heard the footsteps of a running person rushing towards him. "Harry, Harry, Harry!" she screamed. Through the tears, he could see her outline, but she looked just as beautiful. Her red hair soaring behind her. Her voice piercing the air as she shouted. She jumped into his arms and laughed, hugging him tightly. He just wanted to kiss her, and let her know how much he missed her, and never wanted to let go again.

Two gentle fingers wiped away the tears. When his vision was cleared, he peered into the brown eyes of Ginny Weasley...

...but...

Harry dropped the girl. His heart started beating wildly. "You're not..." he started, staring at the girl who was sitting on the soft earth. She was young, much too young to be *his* Ginny, but she bore an excellent resemblance to his wife. The red hair, the freckles, the brown eyes, even the way her face was shaped. But it wasn't her. It wasn't Ginny Weasley.

"Harry, what's wrong?" the strange girl asked.

Harry backed up and tripped on the first step to the porch. He heard the door open behind him and Fred's voice. "Gin, what did you do to your godfather?"

"I don't know, Dad," the girl answered, looking at Harry with worry. "Harry, are you okay." She came closer. "Harry..."

Harry shook with fear. "No, no, no, no," he muttered, as he stood up. He rushed towards the tombstones in the backyard. He could see the first one, marked with Charlie Weasley's name who had died on the date of the Final Battle, and as he came closer, *he knew*. He knew what name he'd find on the second tombstone.

Harry wasn't sure how long he stayed in front of Ginevra Molly Weasley's tombstone. The sun had set and the night had come. He could vaguely remember other members of the Order coming out to offer comfort, but he said nothing to them. He simply wept, and wept bitterly, and wept for the woman who never became his wife, for the woman he would never have children with, and for the children he had somehow snuffed from existence altogether.

"I didn't know you meant her when you asked about Ginny," Ron's voice said from behind him. "I'm sorry. It's just that it's been a long time since you talked about her. I assumed..."

"It's not your fault, Ron," Harry said dryly. "It's mine."

Ron sank to his knees beside Harry. "Don't say that, Harry," Ron said.

"Would you believe me if I said that in another life, Ginny and I were in love?"

"Of course," Ron replied. "I saw the way you two were and-"

"No," Harry said, balling his hands into fists. "I mean, we were married, and we had kids, and... we were happy..."

Ron nodded. "Not a day goes by that I don't see that life for you, too, mate," Ron answered. "I wake up sometimes, and think she's still alive, like I'm going to hear her sneaking out of her bed to come visit you like she used to do."

“No!” Harry said, more forceful. He dug his hands into his pocket and pulled the battered picture of his once-alive family. He handed it to Ron. “We had a family, Ron, and I ruined it.”

Ron studied the picture. “This isn’t funny, Harry,” Ron said quietly. “I... don’t know what you’re trying to prove here, but a trick picture isn’t going to bring her back.”

“*I’m* going to bring her back,” Harry whispered, but Ron didn’t hear. He handed the photo back to Harry. “What happened to her, Ron? What happened?”

Ron nodded. “I knew you’d want to know sooner or later,” Ron answered. He dug into his own pockets and extracted a small bottle of shimmering silver liquid. “You took these memories out of your head permanently after she died. You told me to get rid of them. I couldn’t, because I knew one day you’d ask about her.” He handed the bottle to Harry, pat him on the shoulder, and left him alone.

Harry held the bottle of memories, his fingers aching from the death grip upon it. The answers were there, in his hands, in the bottle. He heard the back door shut as Ron entered the Burrow. He bent lower, his head pressed against the cooling ground, and let out a moan of pain.

His fire had gone out. And the cold bitterness of death had come over his soul.

All around me are familiar faces  
Worn out places, worn out faces  
Bright and early for their daily races  
Going nowhere, going nowhere.

-Tears for Fears, Mad World

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#### Author Notes:

*The following two chapters will be a series of memories that Harry Potter took out of his head. They will not be every memory because to relive seven years worth of memories would take seven years. He won't be viewing these in a Pensieve. He'll be placing them back inside his head. Therefore, the strongest memories will be remembered first and that is what we will be viewing. Keep in mind that this will not be every single changed detail of the timeline. I've put a lot of thought into what changed and not everything is addressed. If you have a question that I haven't focused on, feel free to ask.*

*There is a theory that Harry was always attracted to Ginny and that any time during the series, Harry might have realized how much Ginny meant to him. That is the theory I will be manipulating for my own purposes. Please visit for more information.*

*Harry and Ginny have essentially switched certain roles when Ginny became the Horcrux. Since Harry does not have the soul fragment and Ginny does, I'm sure it would have had a profound effect on their personalities. If either character sounds a little off, that's the reason.*

*Some of these scenes are altered canon. Some of these scenes are altered from my novel "In the Words of Ginevra Molly Potter." If you want to understand some of the scenes a little bit better, check out the scenes in that story.*

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## Chapter Ten

## Memories Part I

The sound of crying awoke twelve-year-old Harry Potter. He opened his eyes, only to be staring upwards into the hospital wing's ceiling, wondering how long he had been asleep. He honestly hadn't wanted to succumb to exhaustion, but the events of the last twelve hours had left him weak. Despite the healing powers of Fawkes's phoenix tears, his body still ached.

He heard sniffing. He turned his head slowly to the left and found the origin of the sound. A young girl was seated in the bed, her back towards Harry and her red hair marked with flickering shadows. She made a sound of desperation and sadness. Harry swallowed heavily, not sure if he should approach the whimpering girl.

He didn't know how to deal with Ginny Weasley, despite how intertwined their lives had become in the short amount of time Harry had known her. It was apparent from the beginning how taken Ginny was with him and how much she blushed when he was near. He had always been fascinated with her attraction towards him, and if he were older, he might understand what that exactly meant or how to properly deal with her affections. But he was twelve and was clueless when it came to girls.

Harry shifted, feeling his wand poking his thigh. He quietly gripped it. There was the next way Ginny was connected to him. Before this school year had begun, he went with the Weasleys to Diagon Alley. When they had purchased Ginny's wand, Ollivander had some chilling comments about her 13 ½ inch phoenix feather and holly wand.

*"I remember every wand I've ever sold, Miss Weasley. Every single wand. It so happens that the phoenix whose tail feather is in your wand gave another feather- just one other. It is curious that indeed that you should be destined for this wand when its brother- why, its brother gave your friend here, Mr. Potter, his scar."*

Harry shuddered, remembering how terrified Ginny had looked when she learned that Voldemort's wand shared cores with her own. She sincerely believed that bad things were going to happen to her. The reassurance from her family seemed to help very little. Ginny became

reserved and somewhat of a recluse. It would be later that they would know she was writing in that wretched diary every day and night.

Then the attacks started and another chapter in their connection was written. Harry, who somehow managed to be in the wrong place at the wrong time, had been accused of petrifying the students. After the snake incident at the dueling club, all the attention turned towards Ginny, who had spoken Parseltongue to the snake Draco had thrown at Harry. Harry saw no big deal with the ability, but Ron had been embarrassed that Ginny's so-called dark talent had been revealed. Harry had been relinquished of suspicion and the student body had named Ginny the Heir of Slytherin. Even Harry had a hard time denying the possibility.

And they were right, at least half-way so. Voldemort was using the diary to possess Ginny. Harry wasted no time when the Dark Lord had taken her into the Chamber of Secrets. Deciding to rescue her had required no thought and it barely gave him any sort of fear, but now, as he lay in the hospital bed, listening to her hopeless cries, he was terrified to even talk to her about it.

When he heard her hiccup, he made his decision and hoped he'd be able to offer some kind of comfort. He cautiously rose to a sitting position and, with a deep breath, forced himself to stand. He saw her tense at the sound. As he approached, he watched her grip a mug of liquid (hot chocolate, he guessed, from the smell).

As he stood beside her, she didn't look up. Harry considered asking permission to sit, but he decided against it. He placed himself about half a meter away from her. If she expected him to speak, she didn't show it, and Harry struggled to find the right words to say.

"Seems silly now," Ginny whispered, breaking the silence. She didn't look up to talk to him. Her voice sounded hoarse, she had most likely been crying the whole night. "Being so nervous around you..." Her hands trembled, causing the spoon in her mug to vibrate softly against the side of the cup. "After I... after I killed Justin..."

"That wasn't your fault, Ginny," Harry said softly. "Voldemort was bewitching you. He-"

"Sometimes I liked it," Ginny interrupted. "There were moments when he took control that I never felt more complete. And the power, Harry... it felt good..."

Harry gulped. The words she spoke were disturbing.

"But I also felt..." Ginny faltered and her voice cracked. "...I felt less like myself. I knew if I gave in that I'd never be me again. So I fought him, Harry. I fought him so hard, but..." She threw the mug to the floor and it smashed. "Why me?"

Harry watched the hot chocolate on the floor flowing slowly in the spaces between the stones. The pieces of mug eventually stopped moving. Harry had no answer for Ginny's question, but he had often wondered the same thing. Why him? Why did Voldemort seek to kill him as a child? Why did he want him dead so badly that he would use whatever means necessary to do so, even go as far as hijacking this sweet and innocent girl?

He didn't need to answer. Dumbledore's voice projected from behind them, saying, "I was hoping to find the two of you awake."

Harry turned his head and watched the Headmaster approach with his own steaming mug. He smiled warmly at them as he conjured a chair from thin air and sat himself down in front of them.

"I thought I would tell you in person that your schoolmates have been returned to normality," Dumbledore said, addressing Ginny. "Miss Granger is quite worried about both of you."

Harry saw the news did little to make Ginny feel any better. The other students might have returned to normality, but Justin Finch-Fletchley was still dead. That bit of news would surely haunt Ginny for a long time, if not her entire life.

"I have told no one, of course, that Voldemort was acting through you," Dumbledore said. "That information is yours and you may divulge it to whomever you wish."

"Thank you, Professor," Ginny said, without looking up.



Dumbledore took a sip of his hot chocolate. "There is something else you should know, something that your parents feel it is time to be revealed to you. Until recently, we have felt no need to trouble you with the information."

"What is it, Professor?" Harry asked.

"Harry, you were not the only child at Godric's Hollow the night Voldemort attempted to murder you," Dumbledore said delicately.

Ginny looked up for the first time. "It was me, wasn't it?"

Dumbledore nodded. "And if I'm not mistaken, he transferred some of his own powers to you that night. Not something he intended to do, I'm sure."

Ginny stared. "Voldemort put a bit of himself in me?"

"It would certainly seem so."

The information did not seem to stir her and Harry wondered if anything would properly disturb her again. It was difficult to believe, but it was just one more thing to add to their intertwined lives.

"Sir," Ginny said, "the Sorting Hat said that I would do great in Slytherin. If what you're saying is true, I *should* be in Slytherin, just like Tom Riddle. I mean, I can speak Parseltongue..."

"You can speak Parseltongue because Voldemort can speak Parseltongue," Dumbledore answered. "You, as well as Harry, possess a few qualities that Salazar prized: cunningness, resourcefulness, a certain disregard for the rules. But think, Ginny, why did the Sorting Hat place you in Gryffindor."

"Because I wanted him to?"

"Precisely," Dumbledore said, beaming. "Which makes you very different from Tom Riddle. It is our choices, Ginny, that show what we truly are, far more than our abilities."

"But..." Ginny started, fighting hard to keep the tears from coming. "I didn't make good choices. I was weak because I trusted Tom and-"

"But you also trusted me," Harry interjected.

Dumbledore nodded. "Putting your faith in others is the mark of a truly powerful person," he said. "Tell me something, Ginny, at the risk of embarrassing you, did you steal the diary back from Harry because you did not want him to know how you feel for him?"

Ginny's cheeks went scarlet and Harry waited for the answer. "Yes," she admitted softly, "but I also knew how strong the diary was. How could I let him suffer like I did?"

Harry had to smile. Dumbledore agreed, and was about to say something, but Harry cut him off. "Then you're my hero, too, Ginny."

"You are not weak, Ginny," Dumbledore concluded. "I sense you are both destined for great things. It seems that fate itself has taken liberties with your lives and has thrown you together. Nothing is random, but we will have to wait to see how your destinies will unfold."

Dumbledore stood and patted each of them on the shoulder. "If you two are well rested, your friends will want to see you. Shall I send them in after a few moments?"

Ginny responded positively.

Harry sighed inwardly. He looked at the drained face of Ginny. Was Dumbledore correct in assuming they were destined for great things? He considered how much this redhead and himself were connected and decided the answer was a resounding yes. Whether he understood it or not, Ginny shared the same story he was living in.

She turned her head and met his eyes. The innocent little girl he had first met could no longer be seen in her brown pupils. Instead she was frightened and confused. Crushes be damned, he would have to pay attention to her, especially after she had been thrust into his life. How could two people experience what they had and not find at least some common ground to stand upon?

He heard Hermione and Ron enter the room and shout their names. Harry simply nodded once, hoping Ginny would understand his gesture to mean he was there if she needed him. She nodded to him as well.

In that dimly lit hospital wing, neither one of them could imagine just how important they would eventually be to each other.

---

Harry tried. No one could accuse him of not doing so, but getting close to the fiery little second year had proved to be difficult. Although he spent the summer away from the people he cared about the most, when they arrived in Diagon Alley, he had been hoping Ginny was over her shyness towards him.

She avoided him more than she acknowledged him, turning crimson whenever they locked eyes or Harry tried to talk to her. She and Hermione were beginning to become friends quickly and were sharing a dorm this year so Ginny would adjust better, but Harry had hoped he would be the one she would befriend. If they were sharing destiny, surely they should do it together.

Despite her apprehensiveness, Ginny would lose that in sudden bursts of confidence, allowing Harry a glimpse of the witch she truly was. She was the one who sent him that silly singing card when he was holed up in the hospital wing. She was the one who had convinced the twins to depart with their beloved map. She was also the one who surprised him on numerous occasions throughout his third year when she had revealed how much she knew about Sirius Black.

She had even been there when Remus Lupin had turned into the werewolf. When she noticed that Hermione had not returned to the dorm, she went searching for her, only to have almost died when the dementors attacked. If it hadn't been for Harry and the Time-Turner, she would have been kissed. He wanted to talk to her about it, but she was gone when he awoke the next morning.

It wouldn't have surprised him if she had known of Sirius's innocence and escape when Ron had begun to question him at the Burrow. In

fact, when Hermione shot Ron a scolding look, Ginny looked back and forth between them. Harry fully expected her to ask the question, but Hermione changed the subject. As she ushered everyone towards the door, Ginny stayed behind.

“Harry,” she said softly, “would you mind if I talked to you alone?”

Harry was baffled for all the reasons already mentioned, but then again, Ginny was full of surprises. Hermione and Ron walked out. When they were alone, Harry stood there while Ginny played with a lock of her hair.

“You know about Sirius, I suspect?” Harry questioned.

Ginny smiled, though it looked forced. “Of course I do,” she said, “but we can talk about that later.” She paused, biting her lip lightly, wondering if she should go on. “There’s something else. I’ve been... having nightmares...”

“You’ve always had nightmares though.”

Ginny agreed. “These are different,” she said, struggling to explain. “I wake up and my head is on fire. And I’ve been seeing... Voldemort...” she shuddered as she said it. “Wormtail is with him and somebody else. They were talking about killing... about killing...”

“Me?” Harry finished for her and she confirmed. He looked gravely at her, seeing how terrified she was. This could not have been an ordinary dream, he concluded, not because Ginny wouldn’t lie, but because he could feel the validity of it, as if it just made sense. Attempting to lighten the mood, Harry said, “Sounds like it’s going to be a normal year then.”

Ginny scowled and sat down on Ron’s bed. “Fine,” she muttered. “Don’t believe me. I know I shouldn’t have said anything. I just thought you’d understand-“

Harry interrupted her. “That’s not it. I do believe you. Do you want me to come with you to talk to your dad about it?”

"No," Ginny quickly said. "And I'm not saying anything to Dumbledore."

Harry nodded. If he had experienced this, he wouldn't want to bother the Headmaster with something so potentially trivial. He imagined the note he'd send: *Dear Professor Dumbledore. Ginny had a dream about Voldemort wanting to kill me. Just thought you should know. Yours sincerely, Harry Potter.*

Hearing it in his head sounded silly. It was a well known fact that Voldemort wanted Harry dead and with Ginny having nightmares all the time, should it be surprising she had one where Voldemort was hoping to murder the boy she had always been so taken with? They might even think she was being-

"Ginny," Harry began slowly, not trying to alarm her, but needing to ask the question. "You don't think you're being possessed again, do you?"

Ginny squirmed uncomfortably. "I thought about that," Ginny said, "but I'm remembering everything I've been doing. When he possessed me, there were big blank periods. I'm not being possessed, but I just have a bad feeling about this year."

Harry assured her that Dumbledore wouldn't allow anything to happen and they left to join the others for dinner. Harry wanted to write Sirius as soon as he could and ask him if he knew anything about Ginny's condition. He glanced at the redhead. *With her permission, of course,* he thought.

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Harry sat down beside Ron and opened a bottle of butterbeer. He studied Ron for a second, observing the lacy dressrobes his friend wore to the Yule Ball. Ron was glaring at Hermione and Krum, who were dancing nearby. Parvati had long ago left Ron's side to join some Beauxbatons boy. When Ron didn't acknowledge him, Harry spoke up.

"How's it going?"

Ron took his gaze away from Hermione and Krum. When he looked at Harry, he frowned and looked around. "Where's Ginny?" he asked.

Harry shrugged.

It had taken him far more effort than he originally thought it would when finding a date for the Yule Ball. And he *had* to have one, being one of the two Hogwarts Champions. When he finally gathered up the courage to ask Cho Chang to the dance, he had been sorely disappointed to find she was already going with Cedric. If it hadn't been for Ron suggesting Ginny to be his date, he was positive he wouldn't have had time to find anyone else.

Ginny was a suitable date and he was surprisingly excited to attend with her, although he couldn't get Cho off his mind. Ginny, who had always been smitten with Harry, blushed furiously when she accepted his offer. Harry was sure she never stopped blushing because when he escorted her to the dance, she was still as bright as the sun.

It still surprised him how uncomfortable she was around him, despite his best efforts all year to make her feel otherwise. Much like the years before, she had sudden bursts of confidence around him and although she promised to keep him informed of any more of her nightmares, she seemed to have a lack of them.

As he noticed Cho and Cedric, he gazed past them and found Ginny dancing with Michael Corner. After the opening dance, Harry had opted to sit and Ginny was about to follow, but the Ravenclaw had asked permission to dance with her. He watched Ginny looking at Michael with fascination. Annoyance sprung up as Cho and Cedric danced into his vision.

He looked back at Ron. "She's dancing with Michael Corner," Harry replied. "And she isn't blushing," he muttered to himself.

Ron made an exasperated grunt. "I would kill if Ginny was so reserved around me," Ron said. "Consider yourself lucky you haven't been on the receiving end of her fury."

The song ended and Hermione came over to them. She took the chair beside Ron and started to fan herself. Harry greeted her, but Ron said nothing.

"It's hot, isn't it?" Hermione said. "Viktor's just gone to get some drinks."

Ron shot a withering look towards her. "Viktor?" he said. "Hasn't he asked you to call him Vicky yet?"

Harry listened and watched his friends argue. Ron accused her of fraternizing with the enemy, but Harry had no ill feelings towards Krum. After several minutes of arguing, Hermione sped off through the crowd.

Several more minutes of Ron seething followed Hermione's departure. Harry looked into the crowd, searching for Ginny again, but all he found was annoyance. Cho and Cedric were closer than ever, dancing slowly to a romantic song.

"Let's dance, Harry," said a sweet voice, interrupting his brooding.

He focused on Ginny, his date, and admired her another time that night. She was wearing a red, form-fitting dress that complemented her shining crimson hair. She looked very pretty.

"I feel bad," she continued. "I didn't realize how much time had passed with Michael, and then we were talking to Cho and Cedric..."

Harry felt his insides twist and tried to stop listening. Ginny had stopped in mid-sentence, staring at Harry with an unsettling intensity. Harry met Ginny's penetrating brown eyes. He wasn't sure if he liked what he saw.

"I know you only came with me because Cho wasn't available," Ginny said, her eyes blazing, trying to keep her cool, "but for Merlin's sake, get over yourself and have a good time. Now dance with me, Potter."

Harry gulped, but he didn't feel like dancing anymore.

“What do I have to do, Harry?” Ginny asked, her voice gaining volume. “Am I not pretty enough? Am I not old enough? Am I not popular enough?”

“Ginny, please-”

But Ginny could not be stopped. She cut Harry off with a vicious glare. “I don’t know what you expect, Harry Potter. You work so hard to get close to me, and you’re too blind to see why, but when you have the opportunity, all you can think about is Cho bloody Chang! If you take your eyes off her for ten seconds, I could show you how to have a good time.”

Harry wanted to shrink away. The crowd was staring in their direction now, watching earnestly at this new fight that had broken out. Ron leaned close to Harry and said, “You’re in for it now. She’s finally comfortable with you.”

“*And you!*” Ginny shrieked, turning her wrath towards Ron. “You’re as blind as Harry. If you pulled your head from your arse and realized how much you mean to Hermione, you could be dancing with her tonight like we all know you want to!”

Ron sputtered as he tried to retort, but Ginny’s rage had subsided. She turned from the boys, a strand of hair flying freely with her quick movement, and disappeared into the crowd.

“Let’s go for a walk,” Ron muttered to Harry. “Get away from this place.”

Harry agreed, but he felt far worse than he had before. Was Ginny right? Was he too blind to see why he wanted to be close to her? He had always assumed it was because they shared too much in common, but was that really it? Harry took one more glance back to the dance floor, noticed Cho and Cedric again, and then settled his gaze upon Ginny. She was once again dancing with Michael Corner. He shoved the creature that had stirred beneath his chest and he joined Ron outside.

The next day, he found out Ginny was dating Michael Corner. She stopped talking to Harry for months.



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Harry Potter and Cedric Diggory stood together at the center of the maze. Harry stared at the Triwizard Cup, considering taking it as Cedric had encouraged him to do. After all, he was three years younger than Cedric and had made it to the end at the same time as the older boy. Wasn't that enough for him to deserve it?

But Cedric also deserved it. If it weren't for someone plotting to do him in, Harry wouldn't even be part of this tournament. He had unwillingly took the spotlight from Cedric and Hufflepuff, the house that had very few bragging rights to begin with. Cedric was the true Hogwarts Champion, not him, and if anyone deserved it, surely it was Cedric.

Cedric refused to take the cup. Harry and him both had helped each other during the tournament, even helped each other in the maze when Krum attacked Cedric, and when the spider almost killed both of them. After pointing out all the reasons why the other should be the one to retrieve the cup, they stood in stunned silence.

"Both of us," Harry said quietly.

Cedric was resistant to the idea at first, but when Harry explained it was still a Hogwarts victory, he was a lot more keen to the idea. He lent his arm to Harry, supporting the younger champion so he could walk to the plinth where the cup stood. When they reached it, they both held a hand over one of the cup's gleaming handles.

"On three, right?" Harry said. "One- two- thr-"

"NO!"

Harry and Cedric paused, looking around. The disembodied voice made little sense until they heard the rustling of feet in front of them. Harry peered into the shadows, watching footprints form in the dirt. A head appeared in the air, belonging to none other than Ginny Weasley beneath Harry's Invisibility Cloak.

"Ginny?" Cedric and Harry both said together.

"We have to leave!" Ginny cried, panic in her eyes. "Harry, I had another vision. Please, you can't stay here. Voldemort said it will happen tonight!"

Cedric frowned. "How did you get through all the obstacles?"

"Never mind that!" Ginny shouted. "Get the damn cup and let's get back to Dumbledore. Please, I'm begging you!"

Harry could feel the panic in her voice. This was not another ordinary nightmare. This was a vision, he was sure of it. Harry motioned for Ginny to come closer and he wrapped an arm around her invisible shoulders. He looked back at Cedric and asked, "Want to try this again?"

Cedric nodded and counted to three. He and Harry grasped a handle.

Instantly Harry felt a jerk somewhere behind his navel. His feet left the ground. He could not unclench his hand from the Triwizard Cup's handle. As Ginny held onto him for dear life, the Cup pulled them onward in a howl of wind and swirling color, with Cedric at his side.

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Harry trembled behind the headstone of Tom Riddle, shaking uncontrollably. For a few precious moments, he was safe from the resurrected Voldemort and his reconciled Death Eaters. He closed his eyes, considering the inevitable. There was nothing he could do, no spell that would be of any use against the *Avada Kedavra*. He was going to die like Cedric had died, quick and spread-eagle so very close to where he was hiding.

He opened his eyes and met the brown eyes of Ginny. She was conscious again. When they had landed in the graveyard, Ginny's head collided with the headstone. While Harry was checking on her, Wormtail killed Cedric. Harry slipped the Cloak over Ginny to protect her from whatever was coming. Now here she was, awake and staring at him with intensity. How long had she been fully aware of what was happening?

She shoved Harry away from her. Before Harry could react, she stood up and faced the oncoming evil. Harry swore, terrified. He couldn't allow Ginny to die too, not after she had come to warn him, not after she had just started talking to him again. But as he scrambled to his feet, his injured leg gave out and he stumbled.

"Ginny, stop!" he hissed.

He saw Voldemort's bewildered face at the sight of this stranger interrupting the humiliation and planned defeat of Harry Potter. "Well, well, well," mused Voldemort. "Is this who Harry has called to be his back-up? A runt of a girl?"

"I see you don't remember me," Ginny growled. "Well, I've never forgotten you."

"My Lord," Lucius called, "I believe that is the Weasleys' youngest."

"Is it?" Voldemort sneered. "Yes, I see it now. Red hair, freckles, the stench of Muggle-loving about her. Young child, I had the pleasure of disposing of your Uncles personally. When you see them again, give them my regards."

With a flash, Voldemort shouted the killing curse and Harry screamed with injustice as the green light burst from the wand. But Ginny was ready, using the hex she had been practicing all year. The black and purple light of her Bat-bogey hex flashed brightly from her 13 ½ inch holly and phoenix feather wand.

Harry was on his feet at Ginny's side as the green light and purple light met in mid air.

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Harry awoke hours later in the middle of the night. He kept his eyes shut, recalling the events that had happened not so long ago. It was hard to believe that he was alive and unharmed, save for the emotional scars and horrid memories that would surely haunt him for the rest of his life.

Voldemort had returned.

He repeated the phrase in his head and shuddered. How could he have been so blind that he missed all the tell-tale signs that Moody was not Moody, but rather Barty Crouch, Jr., the puppet used to deliver Harry to that graveyard? He wasn't the only one though, Dumbledore had been fooled as well. And because no one had seen it, Voldemort had returned.

Harry was fortunate to be alive. If Ginny had not been there, Harry was sure he would not have returned at all. The connection between her wand and Voldemort's was the miracle that had saved him, as well as Ginny's determination to protect him. Once again, Harry and Ginny were connected in ways he couldn't understand.

When they returned, Barty Crouch was exposed for who he was. In addition to the conspiracy, Cornelius Fudge refused to acknowledge the truth, calling Harry and Ginny liars. No amount of discussion could persuade the Minister.

Harry heard the scuffling of feet. He assumed Ginny had grown restless in her cot and needed to stretch her legs. He kept his eyes closed, hoping to fall back into a slumber so he could postpone any more thoughts about the events. Instead he felt someone take his hand.

"I know you're asleep, Harry," Ginny said softly, "so this might make things easier to say, but I... I need to say it out loud to you, even if you can't hear it." She sighed loudly. "Things are changing, Harry, and I don't know how to deal with it. I've changed, too, so much this year."

Harry wasn't sure if he should let her keep thinking he was asleep. After all, she wanted him to be asleep rather than awake, not to mention he was curious of what she had to discuss.

"Hermione said we need each other, you and me," Ginny continued, "but I can't keep waiting for you to realize that. I've been dating Michael but waiting for you to like me. I want to be happy with Michael, but I can't do that if I'm still thinking about you. I'm..." she faltered for the first time during this speech. "I'm over you, Harry."

Harry wasn't convinced of what she had spoken. Maybe it was her tone and the way she said it. Maybe it was the strange feeling that he hoped she didn't really mean it. Maybe it was that newborn creature within his chest, clawing lightly within to be allowed freedom.

"Mischief managed," she whispered. The rustling parchment was followed by her placing something inside his pocket. She stood up, walked away, and paused. What he heard next sent sweet shivers through his body.

"I love you, Harry Potter."

When she was gone, Harry sat up in bed, pulled the map from his pocket, and activated it with his wand. In the faint light, he watched Ginny Weasley's dot all the way back to Gryffindor Tower. After several minutes of staring at her sleeping in her bed, he fell back asleep.

And their tears are filling up their glasses  
No expression, no expression  
Hide my head I want to drown my sorrow  
No tomorrow, no tomorrow.

-Tears for Fears, Mad World

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## Chapter Eleven

### Memories part II

As he had experienced before, fifteen-year-old Harry Potter couldn't sleep. Instead of listening to Ron's loud snoring, he threw off the covers and exited the dormitory. As he descended the stairs, he became increasingly aware that someone was in the Common Room already. The fire was lit and the shadows danced against the Christmas tree in the corner. Entering the room, he could see the long mane of red hair settled on the edge of the couch.

Ginny looked miserable.

Harry approached her. He reached into his pocket and pulled out a necklace. He had found it on the floor of the Room of Requirement and recognized it as the piece of jewelry that Ginny had been wearing earlier. When Harry was in sight of Ginny's vision, she bent her knees to provide him room to sit. He took the empty cushion and extended his hand to her.

She reached out curiously and touched the necklace. For a second, his hand was directly above hers. He could see the words engraved into her hand as well as his own: *I shall not tell lies*. It was a mark of the loyalty they felt towards the truth. They had spent many evenings in detention together and separately for their constant clashes with the horrid Dolores Umbridge.

"You left this back in the Room," Harry said as she pulled it from his grasp unhappily. "I thought you'd be back for it."

"I was," she answered, avoiding his eyes.

Harry followed her gaze towards the fireplace where the mantle was decorated with Christmas stockings. Harry tore his gaze away from the hot coals and looked back at Ginny. The fire reflected in her pupils.

“So,” she said, still not looking at him, “you and Cho, huh?”

Harry shifted uncomfortably. He had pined for Cho for several years now, had even kissed her earlier this evening beneath the mistletoe. It should have been a dream come true, but he imagined it far differently. For one, she wasn't crying in his fantasy. He wasn't sure why Ginny sounded so surprised by the revelation when she herself had gone out of her way to support his budding relationship, even encouraged Cho several times. Even if she was fully aware of it, Harry couldn't help but notice that he hated to admit it out loud to Ginny.

“Yeah,” Harry answered. “You and Michael still doing fine?”

“Of course,” Ginny replied quickly, but her face wasn't as convincing nor was the way she gripped the necklace. She quickly changed the subject. “By the way, I was thinking about our lessons after Christmas break. Do you think we should work on shield charms?”

Harry was glad to focus on something else. “Definitely,” Harry replied. “I also want to teach the Patronus soon.”

Ginny grunted. “And watch me fail again?”

Harry shrugged. “It's been two years since Lupin tried to teach you,” Harry said. “Besides, you probably have plenty of happy Michael memories stored up to use.” He watched Ginny's jaw tighten and decided to keep the conversation away from that. “You should really reconsider helping me teach. No one else has faced Voldemort like you and I have.”

Ginny rolled her eyes and playfully kicked Harry in the leg. “I told you before. I'm not the teaching type. And who would want to be taught by a nutter who can feel what the enemy is feeling?”

Harry raised his hand in the air and Ginny managed to giggle. "I wouldn't mind," he said. "Speaking of which, have you had any Voldemort dreams lately?"

Ginny shook her head. She leaned her head against the couch cushion and blinked a few times. It was then that Harry noticed how exhausted she looked. He believed whole-heartedly that she wasn't lying about seeing Voldemort's thoughts, but he didn't buy into the fact that she was completely dream-free.

Her eyelids closed and she muttered, "What do you see in her anyhow?"

The words were almost unintelligible. Harry didn't want to address the question because he was pretty sure Ginny was only asking because she was in that state between sleep and awake, not fully aware of what she was saying. He thought about her question and ran the reasons through his head.

Ginny lowered herself towards Harry and placed her head on his shoulder. Harry automatically repositioned himself and put his arm around her. "She's pretty," Harry whispered. "And she's great at Quidditch..."

Ginny's hair was so close to his nose and he breathed her scent in. "And she smells like flowers," Harry muttered, also closing his eyes. "...and..."

Ginny's body tightened. Harry eyes darted open. She whimpered and sweat droplets glistened on her forehead as her face contorted in fear. Harry placed a hand on her cheek and cooed softly, "Shh, Ginny. It's okay. No more nightmares."

Ginny's eyes burst open, her pupils fully dilated. She bolted away from Harry like he was acid at the same time looking at him as if he was the only one who could help at all. Her chest heaved, her words caught in her throat.

"Ginny, what's wrong?" Harry asked.

"Harry, my dad!" she cried. "He's been attacked."



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Harry sat patiently with Ron in his room at Grimmauld Place. Arthur Weasley would live, thanks to Ginny and the quick actions of the people that mattered, but Ginny hadn't seen it that way. She was convinced that she was once again being possessed and had hidden herself from everyone. As soon as Hermione was able to get away, she cancelled her ski trip and came in support of the Weasley family. Harry and Ron wasted no time explaining Ginny's actions.

Hermione walked in and sat beside Ron. She was followed by Ginny, who looked surprised to find Harry and Ron. She stood there with her hands on her hips.

"How're you feeling?" Hermione asked.

"Fine," Ginny answered quickly.

Hermione's patience was thin. "Oh don't lie, Ginny. Ron and Harry say you've been hiding ever since you came back from St. Mungo's."

"Do they?" Ginny replied, staring down the boys. Ron looked away from her gaze, but Harry didn't back down.

"You have!" Harry growled. "You haven't looked at us once."

"It's you who won't look at me!" Ginny shot back angrily.

"Maybe you're taking turns in looking and just missing each other," Hermione suggested.

"Shut up, Hermione," Ginny snapped.

"Oh, stop feeling all misunderstood," Hermione said sharply, explaining how the others had told her what was heard with the Extendable Ears.

Ginny turned away. "I'm used to it, you lot talking about me behind my back..."

Harry interrupted. "We wanted to talk to you, Ginny, but you've been hiding ever since we got back."

"I don't want anyone to talk to me," muttered Ginny.

"I thought you were supposed to be a clever little witch," Harry said angrily. "Or don't you remember what you told me about being possessed by Voldemort?"

Ginny remained quiet. She turned to face Harry and nodded.

"Now," Harry started, "do you remember everything you've been doing?"

"Yes," Ginny replied.

"And do you have any blank periods where you don't know what you've been up to?"

"No."

"Then Voldemort hasn't possessed you," Harry said simply. "And I've tried to tell you that you didn't leave the couch. I was watching you the whole time."

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The blue flames flickered off the glass orbs as Ginny led the way through the rows. The ceiling was high above them and the shelves were more like towers. Their footsteps echoed off the floor and everything else was eerily quiet.

At this point, nothing else mattered to Harry as he ignored his wildly beating heart. He couldn't bear the fact that Sirius was here in this room being tortured by Voldemort. Although Ginny was supposed to use Occlumency to block out the visions, he was relieved that the lessons with Snape had been a complete failure. Otherwise Ginny would have never seen the torture and Sirius might have been dead before the night was over.

And Harry was not going to allow that to happen as it had happened to Cedric.

They passed by row eighty. Harry listened for the sounds of torment that Ginny had described from her vision, but he heard none. Could it be that Sirius had been gagged or silenced in some way? He couldn't bring himself to explore the option that Sirius was dead. He glanced at Hermione, who increasingly appeared to have a skeptical look.

"Ninety-seven!" whispered Hermione.

Something was wrong. There was nobody else in the hallway. Ginny was frantic, leading them to the end, searching around all the corners. Harry matched her frenzied investigation, assisting the girl in her search.

"Harry," Hermione said. "Ginny."

Both of them stopped their search and stared at Hermione. "What?" they both snapped.

"I... I don't think Sirius is here."

Harry swore and turned away from Hermione and the others. He didn't want to look into their eyes. Instead he found Ginny's face and she looked sick to her stomach. She shook her head, trying hard to understand. She placed a hand on one of the shelves and stared at it.

Harry couldn't give up so easily. He ran up the space at the end of the rows, staring down each one. Only empty aisles greeted him. Sirius had to be here, he just had to, because it didn't make sense any other way.

"Harry?" Ginny called.

"What?" he asked, stopping as he joined the group. He didn't want to hear Ginny admit what he knew was the truth, that they had been fooled and it was time to return to Hogwarts.

Ginny pointed to one of the dusty glass spheres on a shelf. "It's got your name on it," she said.

“My name?” Harry asked, coming closer.

Ginny reached for it, but Hermione shouted a warning. Ginny ignored her and she hesitantly placed her hand around the orb, gripping it tightly. She lifted the cloudy ball from its holding place and handed it to Harry.

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Several months later, Harry was outside the Burrow on the porch swing. The sun had yet to rise in the distance, but Harry wasn't sure if he cared. With the coming dawn, Harry would be returning to Hogwarts and he didn't care much about this either. The only thing he wanted was to see one person, but that one person had died that fateful night at the Ministry of Magic.

He missed Sirius in a way he couldn't begin to describe. He was the reason why he was up so early. The dreams of Sirius falling through that veil haunted him regularly. With each nightmare, he always awoke with questions of why all the important people in his life were destined to leave. His dad, his mum, now Sirius... who was next? How long before Voldemort came for someone else he loved? Ron? Hermione? Ginny...?

The door creaked. He peered over to the exit of the Burrow and found Ginny looking surprised to see him. She was standing there in her housecoat, hair strewn about, and wearing these dorky-looking pony slippers he had never seen her wear before. He suddenly found himself grinning, something Ginny had a special talent at making him do.

He didn't blame Ginny for Sirius's death. It wasn't her fault at all. It was his own. Voldemort had used Ginny's connection to manipulate Harry. If it weren't for Harry, Sirius would be alive. *Harry* was the one who had insisted on rescuing him and never considered for a moment that it could have been a trap.

How could he be angry with this sweet girl that stood in front of him? After all, they were in this together, even more so now that the prophecy somehow included her. Dumbledore had explained that he didn't know how Ginny was included in the prophecy, but he

promised to figure it out. In fact, Harry and Ginny were going to be taking private lessons from the Headmaster this year.

He met Ginny's eyes, who looked slightly embarrassed to be seen in her early morning predicament. He motioned for her to join him on the swing and she didn't hesitate. Harry was happy to have Ginny's company, someone who completely understood how it felt, someone to share the prophesized destiny that he was forced to partake in. It made the burden feel ten times lighter.

As the swing creaked quietly from Ginny's weight, he caught a whiff of flowers again, knowing that it came from this redhead. He wanted to stop lying to himself of why he enjoyed Ginny's company so much. Looking back upon the last couple years, he had always noticed Ginny, always tried to befriend her despite her massive crush upon him, always seemed to watch what she was doing. He might not have ever recognized it for what it was if he had not seen her dancing with Michael Corner and enjoying herself. It was jealousy he was feeling, he concluded, and he had not seen it before because he had never seen Ginny interacting with another boy.

He definitely had fallen for Ginny Weasley.

And there was nothing he could do about it. After her break-up with Michael, she had sought comfort in Dean Thomas and they were now dating. Maybe he was biased, but he didn't see them making a good pair. And he refused to admit his feelings now and become known as the guy who broke relationships up. Not even if he and Ginny had bonded more this summer.

The chirping of the crickets interrupted his thoughts. The silence with Ginny was always pleasant and usually provided him all the comfort he could need. He felt he could honestly sit here with her and not say a word, and it would be more meaningful to him than talking to Cho ever was, but then he couldn't hear his favorite sound.

"Why are you up so early?" Harry asked.

"I couldn't sleep," Ginny muttered. "Nightmare."

"I know what that's like," he said. "Do you want to talk about it?"

"It's not the visions, in case you're wondering," Ginny said, now looking at him. "Wanna take a guess at what it is?"

"The Chamber?"

"Yeah," Ginny answered. "Except this time, he killed you. And I watched, and I couldn't do anything about it." Her eyes were glassy and he watched her wipe the tears away. "I bet if you had known what I was, you would have never saved me from the Chamber."

Harry repositioned himself. "That's not true, Ginny. I care about you. That's why I came after you."

Ginny laughed pitifully. "I was your best mate's baby sister," Ginny said. "You didn't know me."

"I knew enough," Harry replied. "Enough to know that I wanted you alive."

"How can you not hate me?" Ginny asked. "Three people are dead because of me, one of them is Sirius."

Harry was quiet for a second. "I keep seeing Sirius fall through that veil every night," he started, "but it's not you who pushed him. It isn't even Bellatrix. It's me. I pushed him..."

"If it's not my fault, then it's not yours either!" Ginny replied.

They sat in silence again. The sun was finally peaking above the treeline, sending vibrant colors every way through the morning sky.

"This prophecy..." Harry said. "You know, it has to be me, but I guess I always kind of knew that. And as long as it's me and as long as Voldemort lives, everyone I love will die."

"You're not the only one the prophecy talks about," Ginny explained. "I'm in there somehow, too. We're in this together, Harry, and I'm sure as hell glad that you're here to protect me."

She placed her head on Harry's shoulder, leaning closer to him. Harry felt his insides turn with the touch. It was true, they were in this

together, and Harry would be damned before he allowed anyone to hurt Ginny. The creature within, who purred softly as Ginny didn't move from his embracing arm, agreed whole-heartedly with him.

---

The last few weeks had been blissful heaven. Harry had finally gathered up all his courage and kissed Ginny Weasley in front of the whole Common Room. Maybe it had been the euphoria of his team winning the Quidditch Cup despite his absence. Maybe it had been the months, even years, of yearning for the girl that had finally satisfied the creature within. Whatever it was, Harry Potter was dating Ginny Weasley, and he had never felt happier in his life.

Should he have been surprised when his world suddenly came crashing down?

These were the thoughts that penetrated his mind as Dumbledore's funeral ended. He knew what he had to say, but he also knew how hard it would be. He turned his eyes towards Ginny, who was looking at him with the same blazing look he was so fond of. She knew what was coming and he couldn't blame her for trying to stop it with that look. He swallowed his apprehension.

"Ginny, listen..." he said very quietly, "we can't keep this up anymore. Can you imagine what Voldemort would do to us if he knew what we were doing?"

"I know," Ginny replied.

"It's been like a dream," Harry continued. "And I can't imagine what I've done to deserve you."

"You're not coming back next year," she said, a knowing statement rather than a question. "You're off to finish what Dumbledore started."

Harry nodded.

"Harry, now you listen..." she said. "We can break up, pretend this hasn't been the best weeks of our lives, that's fine. And you can

protest it all you want, but I'm not letting you take this journey without me. I'm coming with you."

"I know," Harry said simply, though he wanted to object.

They were silent now, both aware that their relationship was strong enough to wait. The details of their quest could be figured out later, the parental repercussions of their decision would be considered at another time. Right now, Harry let go of Ginny's hand and walked away.

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*The one with the power to vanquish the Dark Lord approaches... born to those who have thrice defied him, born as the seventh month dies... and the Dark Lord will mark him as his equal, but he will have power the Dark Lord knows not... and either must die at the hand of the other for neither can live while the other survives...*

There it was, plain and simple, spelled out to them as if they were nothing more than pawns in an elaborate game of chess, expendable, worthy sacrifices if victory was a result. The prophecy that guided their lives for a full year, which shaped everything they did for months, was now the only thing that destroyed it.

Harry and Ginny pulled their heads from the Pensieve. Outside the battle had paused. Voldemort offered one full hour of ceasefire, one full hour for Harry and Ginny to consider his proposal. Give themselves up and no one else would have to die. But now, that world was far away, inconsequential to their emotions. It just didn't matter anymore.

After he heard the prophecy, Harry had always assumed that Ginny was the power that the Dark Lord didn't know. After all, Ginny had full access to Voldemort's mind and the ability had saved their lives and provided valuable information numerous times over the past ten months. Ginny was also what gave him the strength and the power to continue. But like so many other things, Harry was completely wrong.

Neither can live while the other survives



*Neither can live while "The Other" survives*

The Other was Ginny.

They collapsed on the floor together. Harry was leaning against the Pensieve. Ginny never clung so tightly to Harry before. It was a grip so hard that it made Harry hurt, but he welcomed the feeling. As long as Ginny was hurting him, it meant that she was still alive.

Harry held onto her. She was his power. She was his life. She was his source of breathing. Without her these past ten months, Harry wouldn't have survived. They remained steadfast in their promise, stayed true to their resolution. The only times their decision faltered was when Ginny gave him his birthday gift and Harry returned the gift on her birthday. After those incidents, their relationship remained as neutral as possible.

Harry clenched his fist. He would give anything now to change that. He always assumed that he would have years to love her after they destroyed Voldemort. Giving up ten months of physical love seemed like a worthy sacrifice. Now he cursed himself for being so hopeful.

"Harry," Ginny whispered.

Her voice was stronger than he expected it to be. She clung desperately to him, an embrace that begged him to fix it all, but the revelation they had seen in Snape's memories had said it all. This was a problem that only had one solution.

"Ginny," he whispered back, stroking her long strands of red hair. "Oh Ginny, Ginny, Ginny..."

"I love you, Harry."

The words pierced his heart. He had known this, but they had never spoken it to each other. He recalled how he felt years ago when she said those words to him and she thought he was asleep. They gave him the same feeling, but it was also different. With the forthcoming actions driving them, the words took on a whole new meaning. They meant far more than just love. They said *you're everything to me*. They meant goodbye.

"I love you, Ginny."

With every bit of strength, she lifted herself to her feet. Her eyes were full of tears, her cheeks were flowing like a river, but she managed to speak. "I can't let Voldemort do it," she whispered. Her hand trembled as she reached into her pocket, extracting the wand from within. She lifted the tip to her chin, whimpering.

Harry immediately pulled her arm away from her face. "No, no, no," Harry begged upon his knees. "There's got to be another way. Please, just wait, we'll figure this out."

Ginny closed her eyes. "You know that's not true, Harry."

Harry repeated himself frantically. "Don't be so damn noble, Ginny. Let's stop and think about this, please."

Ginny shook her head tearfully and opened her eyes again. "What would you do, Harry, if you were in my situation? What would you do if you had to die to save me?" she asked, but she knew the answer. "Look at Dumbledore, look at Snape... they were ready to die for this cause. I'm *not* afraid to die, Harry, but I'm scared shitless to leave you."

"I can't go on without you, Ginny," he whispered. "If you leave, what is there left to fight for?"

"*Everything!*" she cried. "For life and love. For everyone else. You have to win."

"Any victory is hollow without you," Harry sobbed. His knees weakened.

Ginny grabbed his face and placed her mouth across his own. Their lips hungrily swept over each other, wanting, needing like never before. After several seconds, she pushed him back and raised her wand to her chin again.

She let it drop back down. "I can't do it," she wept. "Harry, please, you... you have to..."

Harry let out an inhuman sob, feeling the seedy fingers of death gripping every part of his body, eagerly ready to remove the pieces that belonged to Ginny. Harry was weak, because he just pictured in his head something that would never happen. He would never marry Ginny, never start a life together, never raise their children.

Life was cruel. And Harry hated it.

Ginny placed her wand in Harry's hand. "No, no, no," Harry sobbed loudly as she cupped his hands in her own and raised both their hands. The tip of the wand touched her chin again and she closed her eyes. Harry shook his head frantically, repeating his words over and over again, feeling the hot, heavy tears burn his eyes and cheeks. He gritted his teeth.

"Do it," Ginny whispered and breathed the last breath she would ever take.

Harry closed his eyes as well. With a second's more hesitation, Harry was as ready as he would ever be.

*"Avada Kedavra."*

*And I find it kind of funny  
I find it kind of sad  
The dreams in which I'm dying  
Are the best I've ever had.*

*-Tears for Fears, Mad World*

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## **Chapter Twelve**

### **Of Lightning and Fire**

Harry stood in Ginny's old room. He knew now that this was where he had stayed in the twenty years that had passed since the defeat of Voldemort. The room had changed very little from the way he remembered it. A Holyhead Harpies poster from two decades ago still hung on the wall. A bottle of flowery scented shampoo sat on the bedside table. Harry knew the only differences would be the clothing in the wardrobe. Since Harry had removed the memories in this timeline, he wouldn't have known how important Ginny was to him, but a message was tacked to the wall, instructing him to keep the room as it was.

There was another difference. On the wall, there was a shelf that held a small, rectangular glass case. This was where Harry was standing in front of. He looked at Ginny's 13 ½ holly and phoenix feather wand and then held the *same* wand that belonged to him against the glass case.

He felt more of the tears he had been crying falling from his eyes. It was difficult to distinguish all the real memories of this timeline from the ones that no longer existed. Even with the added memories of Ron's bottle, he could only really sift through the strongest, most emotional memories. He assumed that the reality of this world would eventually come to him since he was already remembering other details. For instance, he knew that Cho Chang and Victor Krum both had perished in the Final Battle and Colin Creevey had survived, that Ginny had hooked up Neville and Luna for the Yule Ball and that they eventually married, and that Dudley not only killed Vernon and Pentunia, but his future wife Helen.

All these details mattered very little to him. Ginny was dead. *He had killed her*. He only hoped that maybe fate would take pity on him and allow him to join Ginny in death. Isn't that what he wanted to do so long ago? He had entered the forest to face Voldemort, not because he *had* to die, but because he *wanted* to die. Even that he had failed to do. When he met Dumbledore at King's Cross, he explained a lot, but Harry felt his former professor knew more than he was letting on.

Dumbledore explained the mistake that Voldemort had made when he rebuilt his body with Harry's blood. If Harry had been the Horcrux, he would have lived while the piece of Voldemort would perish. Since Ginny had no blood protection, her death was necessary. Harry listened with a damaged heart and the former headmaster said that destiny had been redefined. Dumbledore had known, Harry guessed now, about the changed timeline, much like the Prewett Twins had also. It took every bit of strength to follow Dumbledore's request and return to defeat Voldemort.

The only thing that held Harry to life now was the possibility of changing it. He needed to know if Cronus was still here in this timeline and if he would be willing to help again. He had no idea where to start since he couldn't walk into the Ministry again. Surely it was a miracle that he hadn't even met any enemies.

The door burst open and Harry jumped in fear. Ginny, the 15-year-old daughter of Fred and Angelina, cleared the way, rushing to the bed and throwing off the excess objects on it. She quickly pulled the covers down as Victoire and Teddy assisted Ollivander through the door.

"What's happened?" Harry called out as Ginny exited.

Teddy helped Ollivander into the bed. His leg was bandaged and the blood was already staining from the inside out. Teddy turned towards Harry. "We just infiltrated the Ministry and took back a few of our men," he informed.

Harry stared at Ollivander, who was wincing in pain. "Who else is here?" Harry asked.

“Hagrid is downstairs, Bill is upstairs, and Susan, Colin, Dennis, Parvati, Lavender, and Padma are in the bunker,” Teddy replied. “Hagrid is injured badly,” he added solemnly. He was now looking at Ollivander. “As soon as Ernie or Molly can get to you, they’ll be up. Can your leg hold out a little longer?”

“I’ve been through worse,” Ollivander muttered.

“Why were they all captured?” Harry asked.

“Information on you,” Teddy answered. “Dudley wants to be absolutely certain you’re gone. We decided that it’s best for now that we let him think you are.”

Victoire pulled on Teddy’s sleeve. “We should let Mr. Ollivander rest.”

Harry went to follow them as they left the room, but Ollivander called out to him. Harry turned and stopped in the doorway. He motioned for Harry to come closer.

“Harry, no one else is aware of this right now,” Ollivander said gravely. “Our new Minister feels that I know the whereabouts of the Elder Wand. To set my mind at ease, please show me that you do not carry it around with you.”

Harry could clearly see in his mind Dumbledore’s tomb, where he had placed the wand many years ago. Harry presented Ollivander with his wand. Ollivander studied it for several seconds, turning it over in his hands.

“I see you’ve been using Miss Weasley’s wand,” he replied, staring inquisitively at the slender wood. “How very curious though. It does not bear her signature, but rather yours.” His eyes flickered to the shelf that held Ginny’s wand. “Harry, bring me that wand, please.”

Harry was hesitant but obliged. He stepped to the glass case, lifted the lid up, and extracted the wand that had not been used in two decades. He delivered it to Ollivander as if he were holding something extremely valuable.

After several minutes of observation, Ollivander looked perplexed. "Impossible," he muttered. "Harry, these are the *exact same* wand. Where did you find this?"

"I've always had that wand," Harry replied. "Are you sure you're not mistaken?"

"Mr. Potter, a man does not get into the wand profession for lack of something better to do," Ollivander said. "Now you don't have to tell me where you acquired this wand, but do no insult my expertise in such matters by suggesting I could be mistaken."

"I'm sorry, Ollivander-"

"I remember every wand, *every wand* I have ever made and beyond any doubt, these wands are one and the same. The only difference is that this wand-" he handed Harry's back to him, "bears your signature. And this version-" he held up Ginny's wand, "bears Ginny Weasley's signature."

Ollivander repositioned himself and grimaced because of the pain.

Harry rubbed the smooth wood of the holly. He stared from his wand back to the one in Ollivander's grip. "What would happen," Harry started, "if these wands were forced to duel."

"An interesting question," Ollivander said. "No doubt, you are thinking of the link between Ginny's and You-Know-Who's wand cores."

Harry nodded.

Ollivander nodded thoughtfully. "Their wands merely *shared* cores, but this... this is the exact *same* phoenix feather. If sharing a core wields a connection, I can only imagine the implications of this impossibility. Perhaps nothing and the spells would cancel each other out. Perhaps..." Ollivander paused, turning the wand over again in his hand. "...I can tell you this, Harry, I would not like to be the first to find out."

There was a knock on the door. Harry turned from Ollivander and saw Ginny in the doorway. It was remarkable how much she looked

like his wife at that age. "Ollivander," she said, "do you need anything? Are you comfortable?"

"My leg is still holding up, my dear," Ollivander replied.

"My Gran will be up in a few minutes," Ginny said. She looked towards Harry. "And Harry, Draco is here to see you."

Harry frowned and searched his memories for the reason why his school enemy would be here at the secret headquarters of the Order. He took Ginny's wand back from Ollivander and placed it inside the glass case. He followed his goddaughter out.

"So, we're pretty close, you and me, huh?" Harry asked her as they descended the stairwell. He hoped the question wouldn't be too odd for her.

Ginny nodded. "Dad said you're having trouble remembering things," she said. "You really scared me outside."

"Sorry about that," Harry replied. "Seeing you made me remember things I guess I thought I had forgotton."

"I'm sorry that I look so much like her," Ginny said. "Uncle Ron said he gave you the memories back. Did you... I mean, are they really sad?"

Tears were burning the corners of his eyes. He guessed that he and Ginny spoke a lot about their troubles, otherwise he doubted whether the teenager would bother asking. "The worst," he answered. "I can't believe your family still cares for me after that."

Ginny shook her head. "No one really knows what happened to Aunt Ginny," she said. "You never told anyone the details."

They entered the kitchen. Draco Malfoy stood against the counter. His appearance had not changed much in twenty years but he carried himself in a way that reminded Harry of someone. Ginny squeezed his hand and left the room and the schoolmates alone.

"Malfoy," Harry said slowly, "what are you doing here?"



Malfoy smirked. "They said your memory has been a little obscure," he said. He strolled closer to a chair and placed his hands on its back. "I'm here, Potter, to give you a full report."

"What are you talking about?" Harry asked.

"While you've been on your holiday, I've been risking my neck to clean up your messes," Malfoy replied. The stench of arrogance permeated. "Thanks to me, your run-in with Dursley's Aurors is taken care of. The new Minister is none the wiser."

"You're..." Harry started, feeling superior. "You're my spy at the Ministry?"

Malfoy gripped the chair. "Let's get one thing straight. I'm not '*your anything*'. I claim no allegiance to you. There's one reason and one reason only that I work for peace and it sure as hell has nothing to do with you."

"Then why?" Harry muttered to himself, searching his memories for everything Draco-related. He settled on a series of memories: instead of scheming, Ginny wanted to approach Draco directly about his plans in his seventh year. Harry finally agreed, but hid beneath the Cloak in order to keep her safe. After months and months of conversation, Draco finally admitted that he was done with the Dark Lord and turned spy for them.

And then one detail arose that astounded him.

"You- you loved her?" Harry questioned in disbelief.

Draco's arrogant face turned to anger. "We agreed *never* to speak of her again!" he shouted, his grip tightening around the chair.

Harry was astonished. Had Malfoy always felt like this, even in the other timeline? Pieces began to fall into place. Harry always assumed that Malfoy hated him because he was simply Harry Potter. Could it be that his disdain originated because Ginny had always loved Harry? Was that why he chose to help Dumbledore's Army when the Carrows had control? Was that why Ginny had such a profound effect on the Slytherin?

"Do not forget," Malfoy began, "that it is I, alone, who knows how weak you were." He started to circle the table.

Harry stepped closer to him also. Clenching his fist, he snarled, "I wasn't weak!"

"You call it strength then?" Malfoy shouted, now directly in front of Harry. "You came to me and *begged* that I remove the memories. And let me tell you something, Potter, I've *never* forgiven you for what you did to her."

"I don't care what you have or have not forgiven me for," Harry screamed. "*I can't even forgive myself!*"

"Then forget about it!" Malfoy shouted. "That's what you're best at, right? Running from pain."

"I'd like to see you do what I've done!" Harry screamed. "Love someone so much that you'd do anything for them."

"I do it every day!" Malfoy screamed back. "You think I *like* taking orders from you? You think this is a picnic for me to know that she chose *you* over me? This is the only damn way I can atone for letting her down, for not saving her *from you!*"

"If you don't like it, I have no problem with you leaving," Harry growled. "I don't need you."

"Don't need me?" Malfoy repeated venomously. "You can sleep soundly in your bed tonight because you *do* need me. Or have you forgotten something else, that I'm in charge of Magical Law Enforcement? That no one else is chummy with your cousin? Any information you have from the Ministry is because *I* alone have access to whatever the hell I please."

Malfoy and Harry stared each other down. Both were seething and shaking from anger. Finally, Malfoy breathed in angrily and turned from Harry. Harry watched him approach the door as a thought hit him.

“Malfoy, wait,” Harry called. He didn’t expect the man to pause, but he did. His hand was on the doorknob, waiting for Harry to say something stupid. “Do you have access to *all* departments?”

Malfoy nodded. “What about it, Potter?”

“I need to get into the Department of Mysteries.”

*But everything I can't remember  
as fucked up as it may seem  
the consequences that I've rendered  
I've stretched myself beyond my means*

*-Staind, It's Been Awhile*

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## **Chapter Thirteen**

### **Infiltration**

Harry was a prisoner. His two oppressors led him into the Ministry. With his hands bound behind his back and their wands pointed directly at him, Harry looked as if he had no choice but to submit to their control. He stepped carefully into the Atrium. Of course, if Harry had wanted to loosen the ropes, he would have had no trouble whatsoever. They were not tied to keep him, they were tied to allow others to think he was being kept. His captors were not suppressing him more than they were supposed to look as if they were. Malfoy led the way through the busy lobby as Harry followed. Behind him, Ron was dressed in his Auror uniforms, his wand poking his friend's lower back.

Harry gazed at the immense Atrium. As early as they had risen to perform the plan, there were still many Ministry workers rushing through the lobby. Harry recognized many of them as witches and wizards who worked with him before and many looked terrified to even be there anymore. Harry's gaze turned towards the far end of the lobby where the main statue would stand. Dudley Dursley's granite likeness stared back at him with an inscription he couldn't read from where he was.

As they proceeded into the crowd, everyone they passed stopped walking or performing their tasks to stare at the prisoner and his captors. The man whom Dudley Dursley had been searching for had finally been apprehended after two months of absence. The reward of his discovery was bountiful. Although the Minister's motives were disguised as good natured, most people understood that it didn't matter if he was brought in dead or alive.

Dean Thomas stopped several feet ahead of them with a stack of papers in his hand. His face contorted in confusion as he gripped the parchments.

"He knows," Harry hissed to Malfoy.

"I told you," Malfoy hissed over his shoulder, "I took care of your mess-ups. Now stop talking and drawing attention to us."

Ron nudged Harry in the back. "As much as I hate admitting it, he's right," Ron whispered in Harry's ear. "We don't want Dudley to know you're back until after you're done." Harry nodded and Ron asked one more question. "What *are* you doing anyhow?"

Harry disliked keeping his plans from Ron but he had no idea if it would work. If he failed in finding Cronus, Ron would just think he was insane. If he succeeded, he wouldn't have to deal with the curiosity because this version of reality would no longer exist. Harry whispered over his shoulder, "Not here."

They neared the entrance for the lower floors. Malfoy opened the door and ushered them inside. Once they passed by him, Malfoy followed and closed the door behind them. He checked the corridor for any signs of human occupation and found none. He nodded, indicating they could now talk.

"This isn't going to be easy," Malfoy said. "I would have liked to bring more people with us in case a fight broke out, but we can't afford to have people notice us. If one does, I don't know who would be willing to fight with us here at the Ministry or who is Imperiused or who is actually supporting Dursley on their own free will."

"Let's get a move on then," Harry said, motioning down the empty corridor. "The quicker this is done, the better."

Malfoy grabbed his arm and stopped him. "Will you be patient, Potter?" he growled. "We are passing through the prison cells before we reach the entrance to the Department of Mysteries. I would like to avoid all questions if possible."

"You were boasting about unlimited access," Harry growled back. "It's not true then?"

"I'm not *in charge* of the prison cells," Malfoy replied. "It would be best if we had an escort. I have a man on the insid-"

Before he could finish, the door which they had entered through burst open. A woman in her thirties entered. Her hair was jet black, pulled back in a ponytail, and the expression on her face was stern. She stopped when she saw the three of them and pulled her wand out.

"Don't move," she growled, her dark eyes watching each one of them. "Someone infiltrated the Ministry yesterday, Draco, disguised with Polyjuice. Forgive me for asking this, but what is the last thing I ever said to you."

Malfoy cleared his throat. "You said, 'I would do anything for you, Draco, even if you will never return my feelings. Meet me in the entrance corridor and I'll escort you through the prisoner cells.'"

The woman lowered her wand. "Well played, sir."

"Astoria?" Ron asked. "I didn't know you were on our side. I always thought you were a crooked cow."

"You're confusing me for my sister," Astoria replied. "I'm the only decent branch on the Greengrass tree, thank you very much. I just like to look tough. Helps me play the part better." She looked at Harry, who seemed to have a look of doubt on his face. "You don't trust me?" she asked.

Harry shrugged. "Your family were well-known supporters of Voldemort."

Astoria rolled her eyes. "I helped your godson's team infiltrate the prison cells, Potter. I only wish he could have gotten more people out." She eyed Malfoy. "Did you warn them about it?"

Malfoy shook his head. "Potter had it in his head that he didn't need my reports."

"Pity," Astoria replied. "Then I'm here to warn you. What goes on in there is not for those with weak stomachs. Dudley has this obsession with watching people suffer."

"And he plans to set up more of these around the country," Malfoy added.

"For Muggles?" Harry asked.

"For *anyone* Dudley wants to feel superior to," Astoria answered. She checked her watch. "Let's get a move on. Smith's shift is over and I told McLaggen that he didn't need to take his place."

Astoria led the way through the corridor towards the door to the lower levels. Harry wanted to rid himself of the ropes that held his arms back but Malfoy yelled at him. Before Harry had a moment to react, the door opened and Zacharias Smith sauntered through. After Smith's surprised look that Harry had been caught, the quartet left him behind and Malfoy gave Harry a smug look.

They descended into the depths of the Ministry. Harry realized that he had taken the wrong way last time. Apparently the Department had been moved, which is most likely the reason why Harry had been unable to find Cronus a few short days ago. As they neared the bottom of the steps, a feeling of misery entered his body.

At the bottom, he saw the reason. Two dementors guarded the entrance. They hovered on each side of the entrance. Astoria commanded them to move to the side. Despite their reposition, the creatures still affected Harry. He could hear the screaming in his head again as his loved ones died. He could hear begging and pleading, weak moans, and then he realized it wasn't in his head.

They had entered the prison cells.

The long hallway was not as bright as the one they had just left. The small amount of light in the walkway restricted visibility. No light at all in the cells gave the prisoners any way to see. In the faint radiance, the bars were long and grimy.

Harry gagged as he smelled what was surely urine, feces, and human decay. He placed a hand over his mouth to block out the stench. He glanced at Malfoy and Astoria, who must have gotten used to the odor by now. Ron was equally disgusted.

The sounds were nightmarish as well. Harry could see no one in the cells to his left and right, but he could hear the whimpering, crying, and heavy breathing of the inmates. As he studied the long hallway, he saw several freakishly thin arms reaching out from the cells, their skin sickly yellow. They were attempting to flee the darkness.

"Harry... P-P-Potter?" called a weak voice from the cell to his right.

Harry quickly forced the ropes away from his hands. He approached the cell and peered into the black. He could see the outline of a woman. Harry pulled his wand out and said, "*Lumos*." The tip lit up and Harry shined the light in her direction.

He gasped at the sight. Her eyes were sunken into her head. Her hair looked as if someone had pasted it on, the strands were surely close to falling out. Her shredded clothing hung loosely to her frame, stained with blood and feces. Her bones looked as if they could be no longer contained by her skin as they protruded at odd angles. She had been starved, Harry was certain, and he couldn't understand how she was still able to stand. He was repulsed, but also couldn't look away.

"Not pretty, is it?" Malfoy said from behind him.

Harry looked over his shoulder. "How can you just let this happen?" he asked.

"Some sacrifices are worth it in the name of victory," Malfoy said with contempt. "*You* taught me that."

Harry shook his head as the woman repeated his name. He looked back at her and studied her face even more. She looked familiar. She looked far worse than when he last saw her but Harry was positive it was her. She had the same crazed look in her eyes. It was the woman who had interrupted his speech.



“What is your name?” Harry whispered to her.

“My name?” she questioned wearily. “Morgan Tebron.” She stepped closer to the light, squinting as it touched her eyes. Harry couldn’t help but feel she looked as if she were already dead.

“And your son,” Harry said. “How is he?”

“Evan?” she asked, coughing. She lifted her hand and pointed to the back of the room.

Harry manipulated the light to see the young man. He was crouched in the corner, asleep and panting. His long brown hair was upon his shoulders, somewhat concealing a gaping wound in his right shoulder. Harry guessed he was about his own age.

“Have you come to release us?” Morgan asked.

Harry wanted to be able to tell the woman yes, that they had come to rescue them all, that he might have failed in saving her son in the last timeline, but he wasn’t going to fail this time. He wanted to free them all, but that was a small scale victory. He couldn’t bring himself to lie.

Ron stepped up beside Harry and Morgan repeated her question. Ron shook his head slowly. “I’m sorry, no,” he answered.

“Then you are the enemy!” Morgan shouted, reaching out and grasping Harry by the shirt.

Harry struggled to release the woman’s grip without hurting her. Ron jumped forward to do the same, but her hold was stronger than they expected. The prisoners all began shouting and moving about in their cells. The noise was supernatural-like and rose in volume.

***BANG!***

The captives lost their momentum and returned to silence. Morgan immediately shot backwards at the blast. Harry could see the outline of her body, pacing back and forth in her cell. Harry tore his pitied gaze away from her and looked towards Astoria. She stood there with her wand raised in the air.

“SHUT UP, ALL OF YOU, OR YOUR SUPPERS WILL BE SUSPENDED!” Astoria shouted.

“Smart, Potter, why don’t we just invite Dursley down here?” Malfoy said. “I’m sure you have a lot of catching up to do.”

Harry was about to retort, but Astoria cut him off. “Stop fighting or I’ll put you both into one of the cells. Now close those traps of yours and let’s get you into the Department of Mysteries.”

Astoria started walking and the rest soon followed. Towards the middle of the walkway, the entrance behind them opened. Astoria and Malfoy spun around fast with their wands ready. Harry edged behind them, in order not to be seen, as Ron stepped up beside Astoria.

Harry peaked through and saw Michael Corner, Dean Thomas, and Cormac McLaggen. Michael looked curiously towards them. “We heard a disturbance,” Michael said.

“It’s nothing,” Astoria replied. “I took care of it. Go back to your department.”

“You don’t have the authority to tell me what to do,” Michael said, brandishing his wand and pointing to his Auror badge.

“But I do,” Malfoy said, “and I order you to stand down.”

“And if it’s nothing,” Michael said, ignoring the order, “then why are you still pointing your wands at us? No, I’m sorry, Draco, the Minister was pleased to hear Harry had been found, but he was surprised to hear you had not told him.”

“I was on my way after I placed him in his cell,” Malfoy replied.

“Change of plans,” Dean said. “We have new orders to bring him straight to the Minister. The three Aurors stepped closer. “Ron, please escort the prisoner here please.”

“Stay where you are,” Malfoy ordered Ron.

As they continued to argue, Harry was growing impatient. He couldn't waste any more time. The torment of this world was unbearable. Harry edged backwards towards the entrance to the Department of Mysteries.

"Stop him!" Michael shouted, shooting a spell towards him.

Harry narrowly dodged the jet of green light. It absorbed into the wall. Harry gaped in astonishment. Michael Corner had just used the *Avada Kedavra!*

"They're fighting to kill!" Astoria shouted. She shouted the stunning spell but missed.

Harry was too far down the hallway to shout any spells for fear that he'd hit one of his partners. As he backed up, he saw Dean fall to the floor. He turned around and sprinted towards the door. This was why they had come, to get Harry into the Department. If he could get inside, he might be able to return things back to normal.

The door wouldn't open. He banged on it, tried several different spells, even yelled for Cronus, but nothing changed. He could hear the shouts behind him and see the reflections of the lights off the wall. The prisoners were once again screaming.

"AH!" Harry cringed as he felt a horrible pain in his leg. He reached down and felt the back of his thigh. He placed his hand in warm blood. Harry sank to the floor and turned around, sitting with his back against the door.

Cormac exited the door at the far end. Two bodies were close to the exit and Harry guessed that one was Dean and the other was Michael. He didn't know if they were dead or alive. Ron approached Harry quickly, blood seeping from his chest.

"Bloody hell, Harry, what are you waiting for?" Ron asked.

"I can't get inside," Harry admitted.

"Cormac just went for reinforcements," Ron explained. "We can't do this anymore. Get inside now!"

Malfoy walked to them with an even colder expression than usual. He stood beside Ron and looked with disgust towards Harry. "Astoria's dead," he said solemnly. "This mission better be worth it, Potter, or I'm turning you in myself."

"Don't worry. I'm-"

But Malfoy fell to the floor. It took Harry a second to realize that several more Ministry workers were running towards them. Harry raised his wand and shouted spells.

"Get inside the Department!" Ron shouted, running towards the oncoming enemies.

"Ron, stop!" Harry shouted, trying to shoot spells around him. "Get out of the way!"

*"Avada Kedavra!"*

The green light flooded the room. Harry felt himself screaming as Ron flew backwards, his wand spinning in the air towards a prison cell. Ron landed right beside him, his eyes still open, his mouth dropped down in a sick look of determination.

"RON!"

Harry screamed with everything inside of him. The world slowed as Harry attempted to stand. It couldn't be true, Ron couldn't have died. Hermione was waiting for him at the Burrow, Rose and Hugo eagerly awaiting their father's safe return. Harry couldn't bear to think of breaking that kind of news to them.

He set his jaw in anger and looked at the approaching group of Ministry workers. They jumped over Astoria's body. Harry shook as he realized that five more people had just lost their lives because of his foolish ambitions. He held his wand up, trying to clear his mind of the rage.

A spell missed his head and shattered a part of the wall. Harry leaned back against the door to help himself stand, but the door was no longer closed. Harry tumbled backwards into the empty space. As he

lay sprawled on the floor, looking up at the ceiling, he heard the door shut.

“You, stand up now,” called a familiar raspy voice.

Harry looked to the side and saw a figure wearing black robes. With his face hidden behind hood and hair, the man he had infiltrated the Ministry for was standing there.

“Cronus,” Harry said.

*Control your own destiny, or someone else will.*

*-Jack Welch*

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## **Chapter Fourteen**

### **The Enemy Shall Be Yourself**

Harry struggled to stand as he stared at Cronus. His leg was thumping with pain. Cronus merely watched him earnestly as he finally found his balance and a comfortable way to stand without putting too much pressure on his injury. Harry touched the back of his thigh. The bleeding had stopped, but he winced as he touched the gash.

Harry looked towards the door. He threw a fist and connected with it, letting out a groan of pain that couldn't be created by a physical injury. Despite his desire to fix it all, he desperately wanted to get back out there and punish Ron's killers without mercy. He looked for a handle on the door, but it lacked such a device.

"Let me out," Harry said, without turning back to Cronus.

Cronus let out a cackle. "You have forgotten the formalities, Harry Potter." He waved a finger at him. "To get through the door requires clearance and that, no, you do not have."

Harry gritted his teeth and clenched his fist. He turned this time and stared at Cronus with unabashed ferocity. He limped slowly to the cloaked man with his wand drawn. "I said, *let me out!*"

If Cronus was worried, he certainly didn't show it. He lifted his wrinkly hand and grasped the end of the wand. "You came here to find me, didn't you?" He forcibly lowered Harry's wand. "I'm insulted that you want to leave so soon after you have done so."

"They killed Ron," Harry growled.

“Ron, did they?” Cronus asked, his crinkled and cracked lips forming a demented smile. “That statement is logically incorrect. Would it not make more sense to say that Harry Potter killed Ron Weasley?”

Harry gulped and allowed his wand to be lowered to his waist. Cronus nodded and Harry accepted his truth. This life would not have existed if Harry had not changed it. It all came back to him. Harry was the one that had killed Ron.

“It’s a hard truth to swallow, yes?” Cronus asked, motioning for Harry to follow him through the Department of Mysteries. They both hobbled towards a door on the far end of the room. “Imagine my surprise when I woke up to discover what the Ministry had become. What a change, Harry, what a change indeed.”

Harry stared at the man curiously. “How do you remember what happened when no one else does?”

Cronus ignored his question. He stopped at a door and opened it. “And not only the Ministry had changed, but the Minister. Dudley in charge is a startling thing, wouldn’t you say?”

The laboratory looked just as he had left it so long ago. Harry hobbled over to a chair and set himself down into it. For the moment, he put his previous question in the back of his mind and responded. “Yeah, you’re telling me. I didn’t think he had it in him,” Harry replied.

“Of course you did!” Cronus bellowed, finding a chair for himself across from Harry. “Think, Potter, about your childhood growing up with him. Did he not crave what Voldemort had always craved? Power? Followers? Tormenting those he felt he was superior to? He even had his friends call him by a different name.” Cronus slapped his knee in delight. “Big D, wasn’t it?”

Harry considered the information. Cronus certainly had a point, but one thing still bothered him. “Did Dumbledore suppress Dudley’s magical power in all timelines?”

Cronus coughed violently before he answered. “A question I have no answer to,” he croaked. “Only observations, something that made

little sense to me until now. Tell me, Harry, what happens to a wizarding child in times of distress?”

Harry thought about it. “Sometimes they have bursts of magic they can’t control.”

“AH!” Cronus shouted, pointing a gangly finger at Harry. “Right, Right! And Uncle Vernon and Aunt Petunia coddled that child like he was going to break. He was spoiled, always got what he wanted, and why?” Cronus scooted closer to the edge of the seat. “Sure, sure, they might have been inadequate parents... or...” He held his hands out to Harry to urge him to continue his statement.

“They were afraid he’d show magical powers?” Harry finished for him.

“Yes, yes!” Cronus cackled loudly. “And that is the enlightening thing about changing time. It exposes wicked secrets. It will make you wonder if the potential for the different outcome was always there.”

“So you *have* done this before?” Harry asked, eager to learn more. “I mean, I saw your grave at Godric’s Hallow-“

“And what makes you so sure that you’ll find my body buried beneath the ground?” Cronus asked.

Harry sat back in his chair. “Who else could it be?”

“Looks, as they say, can be deceiving,” Cronus answered. “You should have done your research, yes, you should have. Then you wouldn’t be so ignorant, would you?”

“What do you mean?”

“A man cannot travel beyond his own natural timeline!” Cronus croaked. “I thought you would have figured that out by now. Otherwise it would have made more sense to travel much further back in Voldemort’s past, yes?”

“I’m tired of these games!” Harry suddenly burst out, slamming his fist against the table and spilling several bottles of potion. “All you do is talk in circles. Why the hell are you trying to help me?”



"What is it that you want to hear?" Cronus asked. "Is it not you who sits alone and wonders if you could have done more to save others?"

"My life was fine!" Harry screamed. "You came to me at a vulnerable time and seduced me with your dark ideas and magic."

"You talk as if you are not capable of falling into this world without the push of another," Cronus bellowed back. "But trust me when I say this, you are fully able of such atrocities all by your lonesome."

"Really?" Harry shouted. "You needed me for something. You sent me back!" Harry was charged with the idea of passing the blame onto Cronus.

Cronus left his chair and stood up, towering over Harry. "Of course I needed you for something!" Cronus growled, his eyes still hidden by the hood. "How do you expect me to fix it all in the state that I'm in?!" He whipped out his wand and shot a spell that disintegrated a shelf of books. "Now, you tell me, Harry Potter, what else did you change?"

"You used me?" Harry questioned violently.

"That wife of yours," Cronus said, placing his wand back inside his cloak. "What happened to her?"

"What do you care for?" Harry asked, suddenly feeling like someone punched him in the gut.

Cronus trembled as he continued louder. "WHAT HAPPENED TO GINNY?"

Harry gulped. "I- I turned her into a Horcrux and... she... she had to die..."

Cronus sank back into his chair, laughing as if something snapped inside his mind. "Ginny as a Horcrux," he muttered. "That's certainly a new one."

"What are you talking about?" Harry called.

Cronus shook his head. "You asked how I could remember the old timeline when no else does, yes?" he asked, his cackle turning into wheezing.

As he tried to catch his breath, he lifted his aged right hand to his hood. Harry noticed several words etched into Cronus's hand, whether it was only coming to his attention now or Cronus was only allowing him to view it, he didn't know. The man's fingers grasped the hood and slowly lowered it, revealing a pair of haunting emerald eyes behind a mess of raven colored hair.

All feeling left Harry's body.

"That answer is simple, isn't it?" Cronus whispered. He parted his hair and upon the sickly looking forehead, almost disguised by a series of wrinkles, was a familiar fading scar, in the distinct shape of a lightning bolt.

"I'm you."

*And the raven, never flitting, still is sitting, still is sitting  
On the pallid bust of Pallas just above my chamber door;  
And his eyes have all the seeming of a demon's that is dreaming,  
And the lamp-light o'er him streaming throws his shadow on the floor;  
And my soul from out that shadow that lies floating on the floor  
Shall be lifted—nevermore!*

*-Edgar Allan Poe, The Raven*

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### **Author's Notes:**

This chapter tells the story of how William Cronus (aka future-Harry) came to be where he was. Keep in mind that this would have been the timeline had William Cronus not interfered and persuaded present-Harry to change it.

I tried to tell this chapter from William Cronus's POV, but it proved to be too difficult. Cronus is mentally unstable and although it's fun writing his dialogue, I couldn't pull off his narrative. This story will be told as a limited-third-person point of view, understood by present-Harry.

Once we return to the interaction between the two Harrys, future-Harry will still be known as Cronus.

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## **Chapter Fifteen**

### **The Story of Cronus**

#### The Twenty-First Anniversary of Voldemort's Defeat

Thirty-eight-year-old Harry Potter stopped in front of a tray of treacle tarts that were sitting on the countertop. The smell of freshly homemade dessert wafted in the air and caressed the inside of his nostrils as he breathed it in. He looked towards the entrance of the kitchen mischievously to make sure his wife wasn't about to enter the room and catch him sneaking a treat before the rest of the party had

a chance to indulge. Deciding she was too preoccupied with the guests, he quickly grabbed one and stuck it into his mouth.

At the same time, he glanced up at the clock and smiled. The magical clock was similar to the Weasley one except for the names on each of the hands. Instead of the Weasley clan, all six members of the Potter household decorated the timepiece. His eyes settled on the words "Mortal Peril" and grinned even wider, imagining his particular hand jumping in that direction if Ginny caught him. He found it amusing and comforting to know that after twenty-one years, he considered something so innocent mortal peril.

His eyes moved slowly around the clock, pausing on each name. There was Ginny name, and James, and Albus, and Lily... and he settled on the newest addition to the clock and family: Dora Molly Potter. Harry could see her clearly in his mind, her deep red hair and perfect emerald eyes. He was completely wrapped around that girl's tiny fingers, despite that she was less than a year old. He chuckled and hoped she would remain asleep for the remainder of the night.

He finished chewing the last bit of treacle tart and swallowed. The sweetness of the treat gave him a euphoric feeling, allowing him to reflect on his life. A year ago, he had been in such a depressed mood, blaming himself for all the heartbreak, pain, and angst. After that crazed woman interrupted his speech, the Ministry was hesitant to host another Victory-at-Hogwarts festival and decided to cancel plans for one for at least this year. Harry was grateful that he could celebrate with his closest friends and family only. He was also pleased to note that his guilty feelings had subsided.

The door to the kitchen opened a crack. A beautiful redheaded witch peeked in. "Harry, you better not be eating them before we get a chance," she scolded with a bright smile on her face.

Harry licked the crumbs off his face and shook his head guiltily. "Do you really think I would do such a thing, Ginny?" he asked, giving her his most innocent look possible. Harry grabbed the tray and carried it towards the door.

"Oh, I don't know," Ginny remarked, looking up at Harry with gorgeous brown eyes as he approached her. Harry dropped a few

inches and presented her with a kiss. She licked her own lips as he pulled away. "I suppose you've started using treacle tart mouthwash then, huh?"

She pushed the door open and allowed him to enter the Dining Room with the tray of dessert. She led the way to the two empty chairs at the end of the table, positioned between Ron and Hermione on the left, and Neville and Hannah on the right. Ginny sat down and Harry placed the tray in the middle of the table.

As he found his seat, he looked around the room and saw empty plates and cups sitting on various chairs and coffee tables. The house had been packed an hour ago, but the rest of the friends and family had left, calling it a night. Most parties he and Ginny hosted ended with the same group of people.

As Ron reached for a treacle tart, he asked, beseechingly to Ginny or Neville, "Hey, where were Rolf and Luna tonight?"

"They're back in the Everglades," Neville answered, grabbing two of the desserts for himself and Hannah. "You know, preparing for their next book."

"What was that last one called?" Ron asked, placing an arm around Hermione and giving her an impish grin. "*Fantastic Beasts and Everything Hermione Was Wrong About?*"

The four other occupants of the table all chuckled. Even Hermione was smiling. She playfully smacked Ron's embracing arm away. "I wasn't wrong about it *all*," she said. "Even Luna admits the Crumple-horned Snorkack doesn't exist. Besides, how was I supposed to know that Nargles can only be seen by people who believe in them?"

Harry grinned and shook his head. He met Ron's eyes as Ron reached for more treacle tarts. He shrugged and smirked. Harry shrugged right back and then felt a smaller hand grip his own. He turned and met his wife's brown eyes. She winked at him.

"Speaking of books," Hannah said, "Ginny, I saw your autobiography was number four on *The Daily Prophet's* bestseller list."

“Actually, it moved up to number three this morning,” Ginny answered, trying her best to stay humble. Harry knew she was actually extremely proud of her accomplishment. “I never expected such a positive response. It has all happened so fast.”

“Makes me wonder who’s next,” Hannah said.

“Don’t start that again, hon’,” Neville said sweetly.

“Start what?” Harry asked.

“Well, we have your story down,” Hannah said, pointing to Harry, “and now Ginny’s.” She motioned to the redhead. “Where’s the story of Neville Longbottom?”

“She’s right,” Ginny said thoughtfully. “You were a real leader during the Rebellion. Your students would love a book about our fun with the Carrows.”

Neville waved it off. “Honestly, I’m sure there’s a better organized person in this room who’d rather write a novel than myself.”

All heads slowly turned towards Hermione. Harry found himself amused with her flustered look. He knew why. Ron had informed him that she had been considering writing her own autobiography for several months now. If the rest of his friends’ reactions were taken into account, he suspected Ron had revealed the information to the others as well.

Hermione shrugged innocently. Instead of addressing the implication, she took the focus off of her. “Did anyone read Draco’s book?” she asked.

Harry groaned. After Ginny’s autobiography had been released a year ago, his school enemy decided to write his own book. It had been released recently. Harry leaned forward to answer her question. “You mean the one where he calls himself the hero,” Harry asked with disgust, “and spends the first chapter bashing Dumbledore?”

Hermione nodded. “Did you finish it though?” she asked. When Harry shook his head, she added, “You should. It’s insightful.”

"I'm with you, mate," Ron replied, looking at Harry. "I put it down after the first chapter."

"I finished it, Hermione," Ginny replied. "It solves the mystery of how Scorpius turned out to be such a lovely young man."

"I always assumed that was Astoria's handiwork," Ron said.

"Indirectly, maybe," Hermione agreed.

"Is that boy here tonight?" Hannah asked.

Harry nodded. "Upstairs with Albus and the others."

"How odd is that for you?" Hannah asked. "Your son being best friends with a Malfoy."

Harry had to chuckle. The previous two years had been quite the adventure. It all started with that first letter revealing that Albus had been put into Slytherin. Harry and Ginny almost had heart attacks. He thought that Scorpius and Al were going to inherit their fathers' rivalry at first, but they eventually found friendship in each other.

"Not so bad anymore," Harry mused. "He's proven himself a decent kid."

"You wait and see if I'm right about those two," Neville chimed in. "If those boys keep doing what they're doing, Slytherin won't have that dark reputation anymore. Al and Scorpius are revolutionizing what it means to wear green colors."

"Think about it," Hermione said. "Our generation didn't exactly promote house unity. That was something we failed miserably at. With all our kids spread across the houses, that's something they could accomplish."

"Al in Slytherin, James in Gryffindor, Rosie in Ravenclaw, our Frank in Hufflepuff," Hannah said, listing off the children. "I've often thought about that myself, Hermione."

"If there's anyone who could lead it, Al, Scorpius, and Rose would be my pick," Neville said. "I haven't seen friends like that since... well, since you three..." Neville pointed to Ron, Hermione, and Harry.

As the rest of them conversed, Ginny leaned over to Harry and whispered, "Don't forget that Scorpius has to be home soon."

Harry nodded and gave her a quick kiss. He whispered back, "So I was thinking that after I get back, we could have our own private celebration."

Ginny wagged her eyebrows. "I'll be waiting."

Harry excused himself from the table, eager to return to the house. As he trotted up the stairs, he caught glimpses of the photos on the wall. Family portraits... school photos... Albus and James during their first Quidditch match against each other, the one where Albus finally outscored his older brother for the first time... He came to the top of the stairs and stopped.

Albus and Scorpius were walking out the bedroom door towards the stairwell. "I'm sorry that Lily broke your Chess set," Albus said.

Scorpius shrugged. "It's no big deal. Dad will buy me another one."

"Lily never used to be a klutz," Albus continued. "I don't know why she's all of a sudden turned into-" Albus saw his father. "Hey, Dad, we were just coming to find you."

"Mr. Potter, I have to be home soon," Scorpius said.

Harry motioned for the boy to follow him. "You read my mind then," he said. "I was coming to take you home. Al, you want to come?"

Albus considered it for a moment and shook his head. "Rose is still here. Although Lily really needed to talk to her about something... I'm sure they won't mind if I interrupt, right, Dad?"

"Knock first, son," Harry commanded. "And don't wake up Dora."



As Scorpius descended the stairs first, Harry marveled at the boy's behavior. Despite how much he looked like his father, this Malfoy was truly a nice person. He had his flaws, of course, one of them challenging Al to a duel in the first two months of their First Year, an idea that Harry was sure was inspired by his father, but the kid had more than made up for it.

Scorpius turned his head to the side as he passed by the portraits of the Potter children. After looking at Lily's frame, Scorpius said, "Lily is getting excited for Hogwarts next year. She's already begging me and Al for a grand tour."

They reached the bottom of the stairs and Harry replied, "That girl has been excited about school since we sent James away."

"Al told me how much she wanted to come with him in our First Year," Scorpius added. "It should be fun having her around."

Harry and Scorpius approached the main hallway to the exit. "You don't mind her tagging along, do you?" Harry asked, opening the closet and pulling out a broom. "I couldn't help but hear she broke your Chess set. If you want her to tone it down, I'll talk to her."

Scorpius shook his head. "I don't mind," he said. He looked at the broom. "Mum said she'd gladly connect our Floo network with yours."

Harry opened the door and they stepped outside. Harry didn't exactly feel comfortable being connected to the Malfoys' residence, no matter how good a kid Scorpius was. "You know, I prefer flying," Harry answered.

Scorpius laughed. "That's what Dad said," he replied.

As he closed the door, he heard his guests in the dining room calling it a night and standing up to leave. Harry mounted the broom and helped Scorpius up in front of him. He kicked off, ascending into the cool evening air towards the sky. The ride itself would take about twenty minutes there and twenty minutes back. Harry really didn't mind anyhow.

“Mr. Potter,” Scorpius yelled back, “Al said you could teach me the Wronksi Feint sometime. Can you really do it?”

“I haven’t in a long time,” Harry replied, gripping the broom tightly. “From one Seeker to another, how about a quick lesson?”

Scorpius had been impressed with Harry’s abilities. When he dropped the boy off, he told Harry how much he wanted to add that move to his own arsenal. Harry told him that he’d be watching for the move once the final match of the season, Slytherin vs. Ravenclaw, was played. Harry couldn’t wait to see his son and son’s best friends compete in the game, although he was more proud of the boys for proposing an all-house team for next year to compete against other schools.

As Harry flew across the night sky, he thought about Neville’s words. Maybe he was right. Harry had originally thought that Albus in Slytherin would be a negative thing, but all evidence pointed otherwise. Could his son and the son of his former rival really bring school unity like never before? Harry hoped so. If a prejudice as small and insignificant as which particular Hogwarts’ house you’re in cannot change, how can a prejudice as big as magical blood be expected to do the same?

It was a changed world. Thirteen-year-old Scorpius proved that, right down to how worried he, a *Malfoy*, had been about Lily, a *Potter*. He asked Harry to let her know that he wasn’t mad about the Chess set.

The smooth handle of the broom slid gently through his hands as he soared back from the Malfoy residence. Although he rarely played Quidditch anymore, no more than teaching his children some fancy moves, he still loved to mount the broom any chance he got. The wind in his face, the wood in his hands, and the world so far below brought back incredible memories.

As Harry approached the neighborhood where he lived, he sped up. The moon was bright and the stars added their luster as well, making Harry able to view his house from a distance. He squinted, noticing that there seemed to be a lot of activity coming from his house.

Something was very wrong.

Harry raced towards his house as fast as he possibly could fly. The feeling of dread struck every part of him, making his skin feel numb. The icy blasts of wind were ignored as Harry came closer. The house was surrounded by Ministry workers, mostly Aurors, and they were all scrambling around.

Harry landed in the middle of the chaos and jumped off his broom. Ron was the first to meet him, his face as white as a ghost, his eyes burning with dampness. He was half-dressed in his Auror uniform and looked frantic.

“Ron, what the hell...?” Harry screamed as Ron grabbed his shoulders. Ron held on tight, but Harry was trying desperately to get away, into the house, and see why there were so many authorities here. “Ron, let go of me right now!”

Several other Aurors rushed over to restrain Harry. Harry finally gave in and they backed off several feet. Harry looked at Ron for answers, demanding his questions be addressed with a piercing gaze. “Ron, what’s going on?”

Ron breathed in heavily. “Harry, I... Ginny...”

“What’s wrong with my wife?” Harry screamed.

Ron couldn’t continue. He sank to his knees as another Auror spoke up. “Harry, I don’t know how to tell you this, but... your family...”

“My family what!?”

“...they were all murdered...”

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## **Two Years Later...**

Harry Potter entered his one bedroom apartment and threw off his long black cloak. He strolled stone-faced to the counter and grabbed a bottle of Firewhiskey. Another night was going to pass, and another night he was going to forget. He popped the cap and threw it to the floor. The metallic sound echoed off the cold walls.

He turned. It was then that he noticed Ron standing in his small kitchen with a small box in front of him. "Be careful," Harry said. "I might have had my wand ready."

"Then I'll consider myself lucky you forgot your wand on the counter," Ron said, reaching for bottle of Firewhiskey. Harry handed it to him and Ron looked at it with disappointment. He placed it back in Harry's hand and asked, "Got any butterbeer or pumpkin juice?"

"Not strong enough, is it?" Harry muttered, taking a long sip.

"Missed you at Christmas, mate," Ron said, finding a stool and sitting down.

"Hermione send you?" Harry asked. "Ron, I'm not part of your family anymore."

"You will *a/ways* be a part of the family," Ron stated soundly. "When you're ready, we'll welcome you back with open arms."

Harry scoffed. He turned his attention to the box sitting in front of Ron. "What's in that?" he asked.

"Thought you might like to start healing," Ron said.

Harry placed his bottle on the counter and ripped open the box. It was filled with pictures of his once-alive family. He picked up the top one and recognized it as the family portrait taken three years ago, before Dora was born. Harry laughed pathetically and threw the picture towards the box, but it soared over, smacked Ron in the head, and floated to the floor. Harry grabbed for his wand and pointed it at the box.

"You know what tonight is, don't you?" Harry asked Ron, staring intently at the box. "Two years ago to this date, I lost my wife and children . And you know what I can't understand? Why the hell haven't they been avenged?"

Ron shook his head. "We never caught anyone," he said. "You know this."

“Bah...” Harry croaked, waving his wand. “Didn’t look hard enough is what I say.”

“Then come back to the Auror department and help us look,” Ron said. “You’re not going to find your answers down in the Department of Mysteries.”

“Don’t think so, do you?” Harry asked, grinning wide.

“No, I don’t,” Ron replied. “We both know why you’re down there.”

Harry, whose wand was still pointed menacingly at the box of photos, shook his head quickly. “No, Ron, I *did* find an answer, and I’m going to make it work. I’ll have Ginny back... and my kids...”

Ron closed his eyes in frustration. “Nothing is bringing them back, Harry!” Ron screamed. “I miss them too, but you have to get over it. You can’t change that.”

Harry’s emerald eyes lit up insanely. “Believe what you want, Ron. You’ll see...” Harry muttered a spell and the box of photos disappeared from the countertop. “Your journey home will be lighter this way, yes?”

Ron looked as if he wanted to say something else but held back. He stood and took one last pitied look at Harry. Without saying another word, Ron left the apartment. Harry took the last swig of his Firewhiskey and placed it on the counter. Thirsty for more, Harry went to the bottom cupboard and was about to open it when he saw the photo on the floor.

“Ginny...” he muttered, reaching down and grabbing the picture. He touched Ginny’s face with his fingertips. He growled uneasily and placed the photo into his pocket. In one swift motion, he snatched the empty bottle from the counter and chucked it into the wall, shouting obscenities as the glass rained down upon him.

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**Ten Years Later**

Harry awoke in the dilapidated ruins of his former home. His whole body tingled as he struggled to sit up. He looked around at the partially-destroyed walls. He placed a hand into his hair and brushed the dust and grime from his raven-colored locks. His lips were still wet from the kiss.

She had been right here...

Harry struggled to stand. He placed a hand upon the wall and forced himself up. As he scanned the room, he began to laugh. It started slow, but soon he couldn't contain his glee. The laughter would not stop coming, gripping his body like an infectious disease.

He had done it.

He had *finally* done it.

It had taken ten years to perfect. It had taken a decade worth of testing and creating, failure and near-success, hoping, and hoping, and hoping... But it worked...

He first heard of the idea a year after the incident, after reading it inside a book. The idea had inflamed him. If it was true, then the research would all be inside the Department of Mysteries. Harry was skeptical when he first found the journals of William Emmett Cronus, but his doubt was not enough to stifle his quest. He toiled for ten damn years to create the potion that Cronus claimed could be made.

And he used it.

He didn't know the amount of potion needed to reach a designated time. It had been simply coincidence that Harry guessed the exact quantity needed to reach Ginny and his family on the night they were all murdered. Harry walked in and broke down weeping when he saw the pictures of his family. Then she walked in, as if she was an angel sent to save him from damnation.

"Harry, are you alright?" Ginny asked, placing her arms around his shoulder.

“Of course,” Harry said breathlessly, not believing he could still recognize her touch. “I just missed you so much, Ginny. So much...”

“You’ve only been gone an hour,” she said. “Teaching the kid some Quidditch moves, I suspect. I’ve been waiting for you.” She leaned closer and whispered in his ear, “Let me show you some of my own moves.”

Harry leaned in closer and pressed his mouth against her supple lips. She eagerly returned the gesture, digging her nails into his back in anticipation. He thought the prickling feelings of his body were the renewed sense of living returning, but he was wrong.

He had been pulled from her... pulled away from her... forced to leave his wife, and his house, and his time...

*But it had worked*

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## **One Year Later...**

*What do you think when you hear the name Harry Potter? The name used to inspire the multitudes. When all hope seemed to be lost and Voldemort appeared to have won, the name alone was enough to unite the people for a common goal. His name was synonymous with bravery, righteousness, and decency. Speaking the name of the Boy Who Lived not only spoke of his title, but of his accomplishments: defeating the Dark Lord at only a year old, doing it again at eleven, slaying basilisks, defeating dementors, never backing down from his principles and morals, the final defeat of the Voldemort, and the revolution of the Ministry of Magic.*

*You might notice the inspiration I speak of is in past tense. That is no mistake. The name Harry Potter used to be a beacon of hope, but Harry Potter is changed man.*

*Fifty years ago, Harry lost his parents. From his childhood on, Harry has been subject to many forms of abuse and loss. Many of his mentors, including his godfather, all lost their lives. Despite such a troubled childhood, Harry sought strength in those who cared most for him. I am privileged enough to say that I was one of the closest*

*people to Harry so I can honestly say that when he married Ginny Weasley and started a family, his life truly began.*

*It is to be expected that when he lost his wife and four children tragically in related murders, Harry snapped. Instead of seeking the same comfort he sought years ago, he alienated himself from the remainder of his family, severed all ties with his friends, and lost himself in the Department of Mysteries. He was trying to disappear, but the Savior of the Wizarding World is not an easy man to hide.*

*I would like to say that I pity him, but I'm far too angry with him to do so. I'm angry because he lost himself in the grief. I'm angry because he didn't seek professional help. I'm angry because he doesn't even try anymore.*

*No longer do I look to Harry Potter for strength. The last attempt I made to contact him was met with utter failure. He screamed at me to leave him alone. That was a year ago. He may have lost a wife, two sons, and two daughters so long ago, but he also now has lost everyone who loves him dearly.*

*Is his mental state unstable? If I were closer to him, I might be able to accurately assess this. I wouldn't know. I wouldn't be surprised if it were true. Every day, I hear the rumors and stories. People have been finding him unconscious in random places of his past: Hogwarts, Godric's Hallow, and Grimmauld Place... People have reported his incoherent ramblings...*

Harry stopped reading the *Daily Prophet* as he heard approaching footsteps. He smirked to himself as he rolled the newspaper up and placed it inside the pocket of his long black cloak. He peered up and watched Hermione looking perplexed to see him.

"Harry?" Hermione questioned.

Harry grinned wider. "I just read your article, Hermione," Harry croaked. "I hadn't realized it had been a year since we spoke. I thought I'd come by for a chat, yes?"

"I'm not apologizing for the article if that's what you want," Hermione said, not coming any closer to him. "I meant every word of it."



"Yes, yes, I suspect you did," Harry mused.

"Could you please take down your hood, Harry?" Hermione said.  
"You look ridiculous."

Harry laughed, but he did as Hermione requested. He raised his sickly looking hand and pulled the hood from over his face. Hermione gasped and Harry chuckled even more.

"What happened to you?" Hermione asked. She looked disgusted at his wrinkly skin and worn out body. He was only fifty-one years old, but he looked twice that age.

"I've just had a lot of time on my hands," Harry said, his emerald eyes burning bright as if he said something humorous. "A lot of time indeed."

Hermione took one step up to the porch he was sitting on. "We can get you help, Harry."

"That's why I'm here, Hermione," Harry croaked. "Yes, you could help me, couldn't you?" He motioned Hermione closer. Hesitantly she sat down next to him. "I need you to go back instead of me."

"Go back where?"

"I realized my mistake, Hermione," Harry said. "I'm tainted. I can't think straight about it. But you, you can. You've forgotten about Ginny-"

"I haven't forgotten Ginny."

"You have," Harry cut her off. "And that is why you can go back. I can't do it. I can't fit the pieces in my mind together."

"What are you talking about?" Hermione asked.

"Everything I change just makes things worse and I can't save her any way I do things," Harry said darkly. "I tried to take the diary away from her, but it ends up with someone else and Ginny dies. Did you

know that Ginny was the only one strong enough to fight Voldemort's power like she did? She has to be the one to have the diary...

"And then Cedric... I tried to stop that... But then Hufflepuff doesn't join us in the Final Battle... and Ginny still dies... and the war rages on for years... that's why Cedric can't live..."

"Harry, you're delusional..."

Harry leaned in closer to her. "And I tried to stop us from going to the Department of Mysteries... But then the Ministry still won't acknowledge Voldemort's return... Do you know easy it was for him to take over after that? Sirius still dies, and Ginny, too..."

"I stopped Dumbledore from putting on that ring," Harry continued. "Voldemort remains in the shadows and the war continues for years. That's why Dumbledore's death was so vital, to lure Voldemort out in the open..."

Hermione stood up and Harry continued to ramble. Harry didn't notice that Hermione had left. He reached into his pocket and pulled out a flask of liquid. He looked at it with a glint in his eyes and uncorked the top. Harry tilted his head back, put the flask to his lips, and drank the liquid in one gulp.

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"That was the last time I traveled through time," Cronus said, looking at Harry who was on the edge of his seat. "Cronus was right. Look at what it did to me. Would you believe I'm only fifty-four years old? Too many jumps through time destroyed my body. I couldn't do it anymore. I was stuck.

"I appeared three years ago and the first thing I remembered was the Godric's Hollow graveyard," Cronus continued. "Right in front of William Emmett Cronus's gravestone. I eventually realized, yes, that there was never any going back. And I couldn't create anymore of the potion, not without the instructions.

"So I joined the Department of Mysteries, yes I did. They were more than happy to take a man who didn't have a past. Makes it less work

for them to erase a life. That's also about the time I started my plan. I needed *you*, Harry Potter, because even if I did have the potion, I couldn't bloody well use it.

"It took me three years to create that potion, just in time for the Twenty-Year-Celebration," Cronus said. "I knew that you, untainted and unaffected by Ginny's death as I was, would be able to succeed. You would be able to work with a clear mind. You just made a mistake. It's an easy one to fix. We'll just send you back to Godric's Hollow."

The muscle inside Harry's chest beat viciously upon his ribcage, thumping faster than he could ever remember before. The rhythm remained constant as Harry attempted to process the words. His thoughts were just as quick as his heart, jumping from one to another.

"That's... that's impossible..." Harry muttered, much to Cronus's delight.

Harry met the man's emerald eyes. They were certainly the same color as his own, even the exact same shade. They were identical to the ones he'd see in the mirror every day. They burned with such familiarity that Harry had to look away, focusing on the man's hair instead. Harry noticed the same follicle anomalies in the way the hair rested upon the head and covered the fading scar. Cronus let go of his bangs and the scar was hidden away again.

*Polyjuice*, Harry thought as he watched Cronus laughing. *He's using Polyjuice. It can't be me. Cronus is insane. He's completely off his rocker... It has to be...*

The answer couldn't satisfy the feeling inside. It couldn't explain how Cronus manipulated him so well and had predicted what his actions were going to be. Only one explanation could persuade the stirring emotions. It was almost as if his body recognized itself.

"Impossible?" Cronus questioned, wiping the tears of laughter from his eyes. "A man splitting his soul into seven pieces, you believe, but this you have trouble comprehending?" He grinned and Harry identified with the smile.

Harry closed his eyes and soaked in the scene. "Cronus... er... Harry... um..."

"Call me Cronus," he replied. "Makes things less confusing. I haven't answered to anything else for three years anyhow. Why start now?" He hobbled closer to the cauldrons. "Yes, yes, why start now?"

There was a loud bang on the outside. The Ministry officials were trying thier best to break into the Department of Mysteries. Harry looked nervously towards Cronus. The man looked amused at the situation. "Cronus then, how many times have you changed the past?" Harry asked.

"I've lost count, my boy," Cronus replied. "I've been back and forth through time so many times that I no longer know."

"Then how can I be sure what I originally lived was reality?" Harry asked.

"Because I changed it back after I failed," Cronus answered loudly, wheezing. "I've seen things that would make your skin crawl. I've watched Ron and Hermione die dozens of time and witnessed Ginny be slaughtered too many times for me to count. Have you ever wondered what it would be like for Snape to have a vicious dog? What about Luna betraying us all? Hell, I've even seen Draco and Ginny fall in love."

Harry felt sick to his stomache and muttered, "Draco and Ginny? Now I know you're lying."

Cronus slapped his knee in laughter. "You'd think so, wouldn't you? I'll tell you what-"

There was a loud explosion in the corridor outside. Harry looked towards the door and felt panic rise up inside. The Ministry officials must have broken through the door. He looked back at Cronus, who was already standing at the potion cauldron, filling up a flask of the liquid.

"Harry!" came a loud voice from outside the room. "Where are you, cousin?"

Cronus hobbled as fast as he could towards Harry. "Drink it," he commanded, shoving the flask into Harry's hands. "What you need to do is go back to Godric's Hallow and stop yourself. Then we can start again. Drink!" Cronus yelled, pushing the container towards Harry's mouth.

Some of the liquid spilled. As Harry lifted the potion to his lips, the door of the room burst open. He quickly poured the liquid into his awaiting mouth and felt it cascading down his throat. Before he could finish, the table exploded beside him, sending him flying away from it, the bottle of unfinished Time Potion ripped from his hand.

Shouts of rage filled his ears. He lay precariously on his side and looked towards the right. The potion sat on its side, leaking out the remainder of what he was supposed to drink. He reached for it, but as he touched the flask, he felt himself slipping away from the room.

He spiraled through time but his destination was not known.

*If you gaze long into an abyss, the abyss will gaze back into you.*

*-Friedrich Nietzsche*

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## **Chapter Sixteen**

### **A Wrinkle in Time**

As feeling returned to Harry's body, he became increasingly aware of himself. The pain in his thigh was still thumping and he was sure that the sensation in his left arm meant that a new injury could be added to the list of woes. He attempted to move, but he did not yet have control over his bodily functions.

While the seconds passed, Harry realized that he had not consumed all the potion. He recalled vividly the clear liquid seeping onto the floor. He could feel the damp spots on his shirt where the potion had fallen upon him. That meant that he had no idea *when* he was. If he didn't know which events were transpiring, how would he know where to look for anyone?

He didn't know exactly how the potion worked, but surely he hadn't gone *back* too far. He supposed that if he went back too far, he could warn his parents before it was too late. Harry immediately scoffed at the idea in his head. His parents surely wouldn't take him seriously. How could they believe that he was their son from the future? It wasn't as if they didn't already know they were on Voldemort's bad side. If he told them the date of their death, they might possibly survive, but it could also only postpone the inevitable.

He considered revealing Pettigrew's true allegiances but the same problems were raised. Without proof, James Potter would surely dismiss the information rather than place any kind of mistrust in one of his closest friends.

The potion had spilled, so wouldn't it make sense for him to not be far enough? If that were the case, he was worried that something might change to make things worse. If he failed to alter Dudley's reign of terror, he might return to a world where Cronus was dead. That was a

frightening thought. Without Cronus, he would have to make the potion himself and he refused to become what his future-self had become.

Another question entered his mind in a flash. Would it really matter what he did or changed since he had planned to stop this timeline anyhow? He shuddered at the thought. That irresponsible action could lead to disaster. He couldn't allow himself to be so careless. His future depended on it.

He could see.

Harry quickly flexed the muscles in his arm and he felt the stinging of his biceps. He groped for his wand, hoping it was still intact. As he held the slender piece of holly in his right arm, he examined his left arm. There was a long, deep gash. Harry was grateful Hermione had taught him how to heal effectively and, although he was no Madam Pomfrey, he managed to do so without any significant problems. After careful inspection of his thigh, he healed that as well.

He stood up and studied the contents of the room. Although there were plenty of cauldrons and potions, it didn't look nearly as disorganized as the room he had just disappeared from. He was certain that he was more than three years in the past, long before Cronus ever arrived.

Harry checked himself one last time before deciding to leave. He surely looked worn out. He might have been able to pass for James Potter once, but that was when Harry at least looked presentable. Besides, he didn't want to risk having people thinking James had survived Godric's Hallow or give his past-self some kind of false hope that he had his father back.

His thoughts swirled as he noticed several cloaks hanging beside the door. He approached them apprehensively and reached his hand out to touch the smooth black fabric. He wrapped his fingers around one and pulled it from the rack. Adorned with a massive hood, it was long, flowing, and colored in a midnight shade of black. The familiarity of it frightened him because it resembled the cloak that Cronus wore all the time. As Harry considered how well it had hidden his true identity, he slipped it around his shoulders and exited the room.

The Ministry hallways were quiet. No one was wandering away and Harry assumed this meant it was after hours. This fact alone would make it easier to travel about, but also far more difficult to assess *when* he was. Luckily, as he entered the Atrium, he recognized someone coming towards him.

"Macnair," Harry muttered as the Death Eater came closer. He was dressed in his execution uniform that Harry recognized from his third year. In his hands, the man held a massive axe over his shoulder.

"Hey, buddy," Macnair said from across the Atrium. "Is the equipment room still open?" He pointed to the hallway Harry had just left.

"Er..." Harry stuttered, glancing over his shoulder towards the hallway and back to Macnair. "I think it might be..." Harry said, looking past him to the fountain that had been destroyed in his fifth year when Dumbledore dueled Voldemort. Harry concluded that it was at least before the Battle at the Ministry.

"Thanks," Macnair said, passing Harry.

Harry automatically looked at his left arm. His sleeve covered up most of the Dark Mark, but Harry could see it was faded and hardly a remnant of what it used to be. Voldemort had not yet returned to power and from the looks of it, the Dark Lord was nowhere near in a state to do so.

A thought struck Harry. *Could it really be that night?* Harry pondered. There was really no point in *not* asking the question.

"Macnair, how did the hippogriff's appeal go?" Harry called to him.

Macnair stopped and gave a snort. "Did you really think the bloody beast was going to get off?" he asked, gripping the axe even tighter.

"Your axe is awfully clean," Harry remarked.

"Wouldn't you believe it, it escaped!" MacNair said, hoisting the axe towards the floor and leaning upon it. "One minute it was there, the next gone."



“That’s too bad,” Harry said.

“You know what I think?” Macnair said, motioning Harry to come closer. “I say that Dumbledore had *everything* to do with it. I don’t know what you think about the old man, but I think his days are numbered.”

Harry nodded uneasily. He was tired of this conversation. “What time is it?” Harry asked.

Macnair checked his watch. “About 9:30.”

Harry thanked him and rushed away.

Although Harry didn’t quite understand the potion yet, he had an idea. He didn’t think the potion allowed him a certain amount of time to spend in the past and then take him back. He was sure that he had to significantly change something before he was forced back to the time he left.

He knew what he had to do.

*All good things must come to an end, but all bad things can continue forever.*

*-Unknown*

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### **Author Notes:**

For clarification processes, thirteen year old time-traveller Harry will be called past-Harry.

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## **Chapter Seventeen**

### **The Butterfly Effect**

The idea was really simple. Harry decided to use the events of this particular evening to his advantage. Since Dumbledore, Hermione,

and his past-self would all be in the mindset of time travel, he might be able to convince them of his status. If that were the case, he could tell Dumbledore all he knew.

This might result in two positive things. One, it would prepare them for the Horcruxes. It would give them a chance to destroy the Horcruxes before Voldemort returned, *if* he was able to return. Two, they would have plenty of time to figure out what to do with Ginny as a Horcrux.

If he failed in *his* future to return the events to normal, then this timeline would be prepared to set things right. He dared not interrupt the events transpiring already though. One false move could jeopardize Sirius's escape or even permit the dementors to have the kisses they desperately wanted to administer so long ago. And the fact that he was not the only time traveler this evening might make things a little more difficult.

Harry snuck stealthily through the Hogwarts forest. He steadied himself at a tree and gazed through the bush in search of the events. He needed to pay attention to what was happening in order to discern when the best time to act was. Once Sirius was well on his way, he would find Dumbledore. Judging from the time frame, he must be about one hour away from midnight, maybe more, maybe less.

He had only been in his hiding place a few minutes when he saw several people exiting the tunnel beneath the Whomping Willow. He caught sight of that mangy traitor and gritted his teeth. What would be the harm in bursting from his hiding place at that exact moment and stunning Wormtail before he escaped?

"Harry, we've got to stay put. We mustn't be seen."

Harry ducked out of sight as he heard Hermione's voice. He looked around and noticed Hermione and his past-self cowering only ten feet away in their own bush. Harry had not realized how close he had come to them.

"*All right!*" past-Harry hissed.

Harry smiled in spite of the situation. His thirteen-year-old counterpart had been thinking the same thing. Hermione was right though, as she usually was. If they had been seen that night, it would have been disastrous. Harry glanced towards the Whomping Willow and heard Lupin's agonizing sounds of transformation.

The moon provided enough light to view this transformation. In this timeline, Ginny, worried about Hermione, had come looking for her. He watched the girl arrive and everyone yelling at her to run. His insides clenched but realized she was safe as he watched her race away.

"Hermione!" said past-Harry. "We've got to move!"

"We mustn't, I keep telling you-"

"Not to interfere! Lupin's going to run into the forest, right at us!"

Hermione gasped and luckily drowned out Harry's groan. "Quick!" she called. Harry watched her untie Buckbeak quickly, rambling on about what they were going to do.

"Back to Hagrid's!" past-Harry said. "It's empty now- come on!"

Harry waited until they were both inside to move. He tiptoed quietly towards Hagrid's house in order to be out of Lupin's sight. He positioned himself against the side of the house, right below the window, so he could hear what was going on.

There was a shrill scream coming from across the lake. Harry's body went rigid as he recognized the scream that belonged to Ginny. All thoughts left his mind as he left his hiding place and raced towards the lake. He gripped his wand tightly and looked across the water, but she was nowhere to be seen. All he could see were the dementors closing in around the other past-self and Sirius.

"Dad?"

Harry's jaw dropped as he realized what had just happened. In the silver of the failed Patronus, Harry slowly turned around and met his

younger self's piercing green eyes and adoring gaze. There was so much hope and optimism there that Harry felt sick to his stomach.

"Dad, I knew it was you!" past-Harry exclaimed. "It was you who cast the Patronus."

Harry remembered vividly how much hope he had felt when he thought his father was still alive and when he thought that James Potter had been the one to produce the Patronus. He saw that same look in his younger self's eyes and it brought tears to his eyes. Harry reached up and wiped the salty liquid from his cheeks.

"Harry... I'm..." Harry started. He never realized how young he looked at thirteen. He had many photographs from this year, but he had always appeared so adult. As he looked at himself, there resonated an almost childish appearance, as if several years had melted away and the raw desire to be loved by a parent replaced it.

A sound escaped past-Harry's throat as he pointed across the lake. "Dad, you've got to save us!" he exclaimed, rushing close to Harry.

"It wasn't me," Harry answered.

"Yes, it was," past-Harry replied. "I saw you right before I passed out."

"No, it was *you* all along," Harry urged. "It never was your father."

Past-Harry didn't look convinced. Harry realized that the opening to save them from the dementors was closing fast. If *someone* didn't send the Patronus soon, time would be significantly changed again. Harry couldn't argue anymore. He left his past-self's side and stepped closer to the water's edge.

"*EXPECTO PATRONUM!*" Harry screamed. The silver stag burst from the wand majestically and immediately charged across the lake. He watched the dementors begin their retreat, saving Sirius, Harry, and Hermione. Harry pondered the implications of this change. Would it really matter *who* cast the Patronus as long as it was cast in the first place?

Before he had a chance to address past-Harry, he heard Hermione running towards them and screaming. Harry wanted to retreat to a hiding place, but past-Harry started talking.

"Hermione, I told you it was him!" past-Harry said.

"Mr. P-Potter?" Hermione said with a confused look on her face. "I don't understand."

"Listen to me," Harry said, trying to choose his words carefully. "I'm sorry, but I'm not James Potter. This has been some kind of mistake."

Hermione pulled her wand out quickly and pointed it at him. Past-Harry cried out and told her to put her wand down, demanding an explanation.

"You remember what Sirius was saying, don't you?" Hermione said. "On the night your parents died, there were *two* James Potters running around."

"No," Harry replied, groaning inwardly. "I'm not Wormtail using Polyjuice-"

Past-Harry, without any more hesitation, pointed his wand at Harry. The hurt and anger in his eyes were evident. "Pettigrew, don't move."

"Didn't you hear me?" Harry growled through gritted teeth. "Why would I save you all if I was Pettigrew?"

"Why would you kill my parents?" past-Harry screamed.

"I didn't kill them!" Harry shouted. Was this really how it was dealing with him? He felt bad for Ron and Hermione throughout the years. He didn't realize how one-tracked his mind was or how stubborn he could be. "Listen to me. I... just... saved... your... skins..." Harry repeated. "I just saved Hermione. I just saved Sirius. I just saved-"

"Where's Ginny?" Hermione questioned as Harry reached her name.

"What do you mean?" Harry asked, his heart skipping a beat. He whipped around and looked towards the opposite end of the lake.

Ginny was supposed to be there, with Harry and Hermione and Sirius. That how it happened in the new timeline, wasn't it?

"Don't move," past-Harry commanded.

Harry wasn't listening. He looked back at himself with panic and quickly said, "I don't want to fight you. I want to find-"

"*Expelliarmus!*" past-Harry shouted.

Harry was ready though. He cast a shield charm around himself and the spell rebounded off. The red light soared through the air and knocked past-Harry's wand out of his hand. As it soared into the air, Harry caught it with his Seeker reflexes.

"Harry, stop fighting me," Harry said. He looked over to Hermione. "Hermione, you're the rational one. Tell Dumbledore Voldemort has six Horcruxes and that Ginny is one of them. He'll understand you. I know this because I'm from the future... I'm-"

He was interrupted by a scream. By no mistake, he knew it belonged to a redheaded Weasley and Harry would be damned if he didn't fix what he had just messed up. Harry dropped the extra wand and quickly left the duo. His feet smacked against the stones and leaves as Harry raced through the brush, a stick slapping his face, but he didn't care.

As Harry entered a clearing, he was hit with a spell from behind and slammed into the ground. His whole body was rigid as he heard past-Harry's screams for Pettigrew. The undeserving accusations were not what gripped his fear. In his landing, he was facing towards the center of the clearing. Although it was dark, Harry recognized this as the same place he journeyed to confront Voldemort. But it was not that either that took his emotion from his heart and destroyed it.

Ginny was in the middle of the clearing.

A dementor was hovering over her, the hood pulled down, revealing the creature's chilling head.

Harry could not move. No matter how hard he willed himself to lift his wand, to shout the spell needed, his body would not react. He could not scream. He could not shout. He could not cast the Patronus.

*Let me out of this please*

“Ginny!” came Hermione’s shrill voice. “Harry, the Patronus. Hurry.”

But it was too late.

And as Harry was pulled from existence and into a perpetual state of nothingness, the last and only image he could recall was the tiny orb of light floating precariously from Ginny to the dementor...

*Expecto Patronum* resonated in his head.

O God! can I not grasp  
Them with a tighter clasp?  
O God! can I not save  
One from the pitiless wave?  
Is all that we see or seem  
But a dream within a dream?

*-Edgar Allan Poe, A Dream Within a Dream*

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## Chapter Eighteen

### Awakening

Harry quickly sat up in a frantic motion as twenty-five years faded into oblivion. He couldn't see. His heart beat wildly and his body trembled. He lifted his hands in front of his face. He knew they were shaking uncontrollably but he couldn't see them. Why couldn't he see them?

And it was cold. This more than anything was the reason why he was quivering so badly. His muscles ached as they moved beneath the skin. He rubbed his shoulders, trying desperately to calm his screaming physique, attempting in vain to look at himself.

Was he no longer in existence? Did this last jump through time cause him to break apart? This would become his own personal hell, to exist without a way to move, to forever be thoughts but not physical properties, for all eternity to be dwelling on the atrocities he had committed against the woman he loved. Did he not deserve hell for this?

Lightning flashed.

It was then that Harry realized that it was sometime during the night, a storm was raging, and the reason he couldn't see was because it was dark. He caught a glimpse of the surrounding area and he knew he was still in the clearing in which he had just left. It was the same place where Ginny had been attacked by the dementor. He couldn't deny the dropped hood, the demon-like face, and the orb of light being consumed by the creature. Ginny had been kissed.



Harry screamed into the tempest and thunder growled back accordingly. Was there a chance that he did not see what he thought he saw? He remembered hearing a Patronus being summoned before he was grabbed through time. Did his past-self rescue Ginny before it was too late? Or had he merely chased the dementor away? What if Ginny's soul had been taken, and the piece of Voldemort's soul seized the opportunity and assumed all control of the vacant body?

The rain beat down upon him in violent droplets, offering no answers, and denying him the redemption he so anxiously desired. He wanted death to come, to overtake him, because he no longer wanted to face reality. Why couldn't this all be just a dream? Yes, it was a nightmare, and he would wake up in bed and find that it all had been just that. Al's picture would be on his nightstand and Ginny would be sleeping next to him. A dream...

Harry let out a sickening laugh. The liquid rolled down his face like a waterfall, dropping in splashes all around him. Harry placed his hands on the ground and felt the soft, spongy muck of the earth. As the mud oozed between his fingers, he was struck with a brilliant idea. If he was asleep, all he had to do was lie back down and wake up. It was ingenious.

Harry tilted his body towards the puddle as the rain continued its onslaught. His head touched the slimy pool of liquid and he shuddered. Water forced its way into his mouth and he coughed aggressively as the flow reached his lungs. *Soon*, he thought, *it'll be all over. I'll be awake again.*

Lightning flashed and lit up the entire clearing, even the puddle of water Harry had his face near. Harry caught an image of something sitting in the shallows. Harry immediately recognized it, but lost sight as the light source faded and the thunder growled. Harry wrenched his hand away from the muck and reached into his pocket to extract his wand.

"*Lumos*," Harry nearly shouted above the whipping of the wind.

The tip of his wand lit up and Harry shoved it into the water, searching for the mysterious object he swore he saw. He peered into

the water, scanning the bottom frantically, and finally saw it. Gasping in delight, he shoved his hand into the abyss and wrapped his trembling hand around the object. He stood up quickly.

"I want to see Ginny," he whispered.

No one appeared.

Harry opened his hand and stared down at the small, black stone in his palm. It was years ago when Harry had first held this stone in his hands and he recognized the crack in the center of the ominous symbol. He had forgotten somehow. Maybe it was the beating of the rain, maybe it was pain in his heart, but he had forgotten how to summon them. It was funny, he thought, how things like that happened.

He kept Ginny in his mind, closed his eyes, and turned the stone over in his hand three times.

He knew it happened because he heard the slight movements around him that suggested a frail body shifting its footing in the wet soil. He opened his eyes eagerly to see her. "Ginny?" he called.

The splashes of footsteps alerted him. He had summoned Ginny, but if she had come, she was not the only other person in the clearing. Harry struggled to look through the darkness to view the strangers. The light of his wand was too faint to locate anyone else.

He listened and heard footsteps behind him now. He turned quickly and could see the glowing tip of someone's wand. More splashes around him indicated more intruders. He turned in every which way, preparing himself for the worst.

"Harry?"

Lightning flashed as Harry turned towards the voice. Dudley Dursley stood in the clearing with an illuminated wand. Harry screamed in fright and cast a stunning spell towards the man who had become Minister. Dudley was hit with the spell and flew backwards, causing a splash.

Lightning flashed again. More people were rushing around in the clearing. Harry became frantic, realizing they must have been coming for him.

"He's over here!" called a different voice.

Harry shot a spell towards the voice and heard someone hit the ground.

"What the hell is he doing?"

More voices and more people came into the clearing. Harry panicked and began shooting spells wildly. "Get away from me!" Harry screamed.

"Take him down!"

Lightning flashed, thunder growled, and spells were shot.

Harry was hit and he felt the world fall away from him.

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*"...tried fighting us all..."*

*"...took a few stunners to the head..."*

*"...don't be surprised if he's a little groggy, Mrs. Potter..."*

---

Harry's eyes snapped open.

The familiar ceiling of Grimmauld Place's master bedroom welcomed him back into consciousness. His vision was blurry, but he knew this because he recognized the thin crack zigzagging its way like lightning from the center to the wall. He had tried many times before to fix the blemish but to no avail. He had always suspected it was some stray dark magic from the Black family that was unable to be rectified.

He automatically reached left and grasped his glasses, which were sitting on the nightstand. As he contemplated the fact that his glasses

were sitting in their usual place, he felt a cool, pleasant breeze kiss his left side. After he placed his glasses on his face, he looked towards the window. It was wide open and the curtain billowed dream-like in the fingers of the zephyr.

The tails of the curtain drifted listlessly towards the bedside stand as if purposefully pointing out where he should look. The smallest bit of fabric brushed against a picture frame sitting on the corner. The glass reflected Harry's green eyes, obstructing his identification of the photograph within. As Harry reached out slowly to angle the picture better for examination, he felt a lump rising in his throat, for he hoped it was what he thought it was.

When James went away for his first year at Hogwarts, Harry kept his son's photo on the bedside stand for all the months they were separated. The following year, he did the same for Albus. For reasons beyond his imagination, he was positive his second son would be waving back at him. He tilted the picture and the gleam of the glass ceased its disruption.

Harry breathed a sigh of relief. It was Albus Severus Potter behind the glass. The boy's emerald eyes stared intently at the photographer. His raven-colored locks refused to stay neat upon his head. The eleven-year-old waved frantically at him. Harry's smile widened as Albus' smile did the same. It was his son.

The sinister events surrounding his life swirled around him, taunting his memories. But were they *really* memories? If his son was present on this bedside stand in picture-form, what did that mean for everything he had just experienced? Could it all have been a terrible nightmare? Despite the supposed authenticity of it all, could the time-travel, Cronus, even Ginny's death only be some sort of elaborate dream? The answer seemed so simple, yet it had a surreal quality to it. It couldn't have been just a dream, but then again, wasn't this his room? Wasn't this his son? Wasn't he home?

*He was home*

The words ignited a fire inside his heart. The flames consumed his every emotion with the very *possibility* that he was no longer a vagabond in the world, a hitchhiker on the road of time. If he was

home, if it *had* been a dream, he was a renewed man, full of fresh life and love. If it was all just a passing thought, only one piece of the puzzle could really complete his theory.

*Ginny*

All he had to do was turn over to his right side and see for himself if she was snuggled still beneath the covers. The task was simple, but he didn't know if he could handle the disappointment again. For if he found her side of the bed empty, unused, and cold, he would fall apart all over again, knowing that she faced death long before she was supposed to. Frankly, facing the negative reality scared the hell out of him.

He just wanted her alive and happy. If she was there, his horror story was over.

Then he heard her. It was quiet, but a sigh escaped the other side of the bed followed by the slow, steady breathing of a slumbering woman. It was the most precious noise he had ever encountered in his years of living. It was music, sweet music to his ears.

Harry shifted his weight and carefully rolled to his right. Another surge of emotion shot through every nerve as he saw the outline of her beneath the blankets, cuddled up with them above her head to keep herself warm from the open window.

She had to be an illusion, Harry surmised. No one could possibly look that beautiful despite being completely concealed. He needed to touch her, even in the most remote way possible, to ensure she was part of reality, to prove that she was, in fact, a materialistic entity. He slowly closed the several inch gap with his hand, stretching his index finger out to touch her. With his breath held, he lightly prodded her with his finger. He touched her.

"Mmm," she muttered.

The sound was barely audible beneath the comforter, but he heard it. He had *touched* her, *felt* the warmth of her body, and she had *reacted*. Nothing could vanquish the creature stirring deep within his chest.

Never before had he felt as if he could conjure a thousand Patronuses.

He edged closer and placed a tender hand upon the delicate mass where he assumed her shoulder was. He lightly rotated his thumb in circles and whispered, "I missed you."

"Mmm?" she mumbled. "W-what's wrong?"

"I had a bad dream," Harry said.

A muffled yawn escaped the covers. "Tell m-m-me... about it..."

"You were dead," Harry replied softly. "And it was my fault." He blinked several times to rid his eyes of the happy tears forming.

Another yawn and a soft response. "It was just a dream. Go back to sleep, Harry."

"I love you," Harry said. He reached towards her blanketed head and tenderly touched where he knew her cheek would be. He tugged lightly on the covers.

"Mmm, it's cold," she complained, groaning.

Harry wasn't concerned with the breeze. He needed to touch her skin, to connect the freckles with his kisses as the ancient stargazers connected the constellations. He wanted to show her that he was very much in love with her. He desperately needed to be tangled in that gorgeous red mane of hers. He exposed a bit of skin near the neck, bent closer, and pressed his lips against the flesh.

He breathed her scent in. The aroma caught in his nostrils and he frowned. The smell wasn't unpleasant, but it wasn't Ginny's flowery scent.

He pulled his head back from the neck and noticed a big bushy nest of brown hair. The owner rolled over and smiled at him, showing her once-enlarged front teeth. Her brown eyes lit up at the sight of him.

"Don't start what you can't finish," she mumbled.

Harry's jaw dropped in disbelief.

*"Hermione?!"*

*Touch                      us                      gently,                      Time!*  
*Let              us              glide              adown              thy              stream*  
*Gently              --              as              we              sometimes              glide*  
*Through a quiet dream.*

*-Bryan W. Proctor*

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## **Chapter Nineteen**

### **Pillow Talk**

Harry backed up so suddenly that he fell off the side of the bed and only missed the corner of the nightstand by a few centimeters. Hermione's exhausted face disappeared from view in a blur as he toppled out of her sight. He hit the floor with a thud and lay there, muttering to himself incoherently, and staring down into the intricate, natural design of the wooden floor.

"Harry?"

*Why was Hermione in his bed?*

"Harry?"

There had to be a logical explanation to why Hermione was in his bed, snuggled up beneath the covers as if she belonged there. It was a trick perhaps, orchestrated by his family, an elaborate practical joke. Soon everyone would jump out, yell surprise, and relieve him of his ever-quickenening heartbeat.

"Harry, are you alright?"

Or maybe he was hallucinating. Hermione, maybe, just maybe was a collection of misplaced thoughts and ideas. A manifestation of fear

itself. That had to be it. What other possible reason did Ron's wife have for being in another man's bed...? *His bed... Ginny's bed...*

Harry placed his hands upon the floor and hoisted himself up to his knees. He grabbed hold of the mattress and brought himself eye level with the top of the bed. Hermione was scooting closer to his side to check up on him.

"Hermione..." Harry started, but faltered. The smooth fabric of the bed sheets, the portion that Hermione was wrapped in had dropped several centimeters, revealing her bare shoulders. Harry felt his face growing hot. "Er... Hermione, what are you-"

He stared in horror at the material, unable to look away, as Hermione repositioned herself to listen. "Um..." Harry fumbled for words as the covers slid, centimeter by centimeter downwards, in sync with the small beads of sweat that were glistening downwards upon his forehead.

"Hermione, what are you- ahhh!" Harry spun away quickly just as Hermione's most delicate upper regions were exposed. He shook his head hastily, trying to block out the image of... trying to rid his mind of... Ron would kill him if he ever found out... Harry sunk his head into his palms and swore to himself. *This can't be happening. She's like a sister to you...*

"Look at you," Hermione mused from behind him. "Is my prodigal husband embarrassed?"

Harry gulped and repeated the word to himself. "Husband," he whispered. *Oh no.*

Before he had more time to reflect, he felt two delicate hands touch his back followed by wet lips against his neck. He bolted forward with a yelp. Without turning around, he said, "Hermione, do you mind, er, I don't know, covering yourself up for a minute, or something..."

"Harry?" she questioned, with a mixture of hurt and confusion.

"I'm sorry," he replied, turning only slightly towards her, watching her out of the corner of his eye, but it didn't stop the discomfort of the



situation for him. "It's just, um, I'm a little groggy..." He averted his gaze once again. He listened to Hermione shuffling around behind him.

"I'm decent now," she said.

Harry turned around. She was facing him on the bed with an oversized, ratty shirt on. Harry recognized it as one he used to wear many years ago. If he had to guess, Hermione had been wearing it for a long time.

"Better?" she asked, staring at him curiously.

"Thank you," Harry muttered.

"Where have you been?" Hermione asked.

Harry shook his head. "I'm not sure. I don't even know what year it is. I can't remember much."

"We just celebrated the Twentieth Victory-at-Hogwarts Celebration last week," Hermione answered. "You've been missing for six days. You had me worried sick."

Harry considered the information. He had left the present and returned about two months earlier than when he left, but he was also missing during this time. In the timeline he had just left, Dudley took over the Ministry and was hunting him down. Harry needed to know if this was still part of reality. "Did Dudley take over the Ministry while I was gone?" he questioned.

Hermione cocked her head to the side in confusion. "Dudley? As in your cousin Dudley?" Hermione asked. "How would he take over the Ministry? He's just a Muggle."

"Nevermind, it was part of my dream," Harry replied, looking at her uneasily. He attempted to change the subject. "So, Hermione, how did we, uh, you know..."

"You don't remember me, do you?" Hermione interrupted. Harry frowned and she went on, "I was afraid this was going to happen."

She reached to her bedside stand and grabbed a book from the top. She opened to a place that was marked. "I was reading this to make sure I knew what to expect. You took one too many stunning spells to the head."

She placed her finger on the page and read the words to herself, following her finger as she went down the page. "In most cases, people have experienced short-term memory loss. I think that's what you have," she said. She turned the page. "The worst case scenario is that you have permanent memory loss, but I doubt that you have that because you recognized me..."

"It's not amnesia," Harry said. If anyone could help him figure out what was going on, Hermione would. He wasn't sure how he was going to break this kind of news to her. She looked genuinely happy to be his wife. Would she believe him?

Hermione rambled on. "...here's an interesting case. An inventor in the 1700s was hit in the head with several stunners and it was reported that he woke up with an elaborate fantasy world created in his mind, complete with time travel and parallel universes..."

Harry, who had not been paying too much attention to Hermione, snapped his eyes upwards and on Hermione.

"...of course, if he were alive today, we'd have to send him to St. Mungo's for being mentally unstable..."

*Maybe*

*it wasn't such a good idea to discuss his problem with Hermione. It was most likely in his best interest to keep his experiences to himself. He couldn't afford being carted off to the insane asylum. He had no way to prove to anyone that his story was real.*

"Harry, are you listening?" Hermione asked, interrupting his thoughts.

"Huh?" Harry asked. "Sorry, what did you say?"

"Your dream," Hermione replied. "What was it about? It might give us some clues to what happened to you and why you went missing."

Harry wasn't so sure if it was a good idea. She might think he was indeed telling a story that he believed to be authentic. Would she immediately try to throw him in St. Mungo's? He concluded that it wouldn't hurt to tell the story a little bit as if it were a dream.

"It felt so real," Harry answered. "I woke up with you and I felt like I was betraying Ron-

"*Ron?!*" Hermione exclaimed. "Ron Weasley? What do you mean? I wasn't married to Ron in your dream, was I?"

"Well, yeah..."

Hermione burst out laughing. "Honestly?" Hermione squealed. "In what world would I ever choose to marry someone like Ron over you? Do you remember how he treated me, Harry? It was borderline abuse."

"He loved you, didn't he?"

"Is that what you call it?"

Harry simply stared at her. Sure, Ron and Hermione didn't exactly always see eye-to-eye in his reality, but they didn't argue to hurt each other. Ron never purposefully hurt Hermione, save the incident with Lavender, and that was before Ron and Hermione realized what they meant to each other. Harry had never seen their relationship as demeaning. If it was, he would have stepped in and put a stop to Ron hurting her. After all, that was his saving people thing Hermione always talked about.

Hermione wiped the tears of laughter from her face. "That was some dream, Harry," Hermione said. "Next you'll be telling me that you were married to *Ginny*."

Feelings of annoyance were creeping into the pit of his stomach. Harry gave her an uneasy look.

Hermione threw herself on her back and began to giggle boisterously. Harry turned slightly as her knickers peaked out from beneath her shirt. She sat back up. "You *were* married to Ginny, weren't you?"

Hermione exclaimed. Harry's face confirmed it. Hermione squealed again. "What did she do? Slip you another love potion?"

"Love potion?" Harry repeated. "Hermione, what are you talking about?"

"What other reason would you have for suddenly falling for Ron's little sister out of the blue?" Hermione questioned. "I mean, you didn't even know she existed until she started wearing that suspicious flowery perfume in our sixth year."

Harry heard her words, but didn't care about the implications. There was one thing that stuck out in his head: the fact that Ginny was able to do anything at all in his sixth year. Did that mean she was fine? And would Hermione really be joking around so much if the girl had suffered a terrible fate.

"In my dream, Ginny also..." Harry faltered, hoping, praying, and continued, "...she was attacked by a dementor."

"See, you *are* starting to remember things," Hermione said, smiling. "It turned out that Ginny became a Horcrux when... you do remember what a Horcrux is, right?" Harry quickly nodded and urged her to continue. "Ginny was there at Godric's Hollow as well, and Voldemort's soul was so unstable, that a piece broke off and bonded with Ginny-"

"I know, I know," Harry replied impatiently. "What about the Dementor's Kiss?"

Hermione nodded. "It saved her," she replied.

"*Of course!*" Harry replied. He couldn't believe it hadn't ever occurred to him why the dementors were so interested in him. He was a vessel for *two* souls. That would be two meals for the price of one. If he would have allowed the horrid Azkaban guards a quick snack, would it have spared his nightmarish fate of thinking he had to die?

"She was lucky," Hermione continued. "Too many things could have gone wrong that night. What if you hadn't been able to conjure that

Patronus to save her? I shudder to think what could have happened had it taken Ginny's soul first. And then there's the whole..."

He allowed Hermione to ramble. As far as he was concerned, this was a victory and he didn't want to hear anything else of what could have happened. Ginny was spared a fate worse than death. She had her soul. She was intact. He hadn't failed her again. Harry's focus slowly turned back to Hermione. *Okay, so maybe not a complete victory. There's the whole deal that I'm married to Hermione.*

"...if Dumbledore knew."

Harry cut her off. "How is Ginny doing these days?" he asked, trying to be as casual as possible.

Hermione tapped the book in her hands. "Wow, Harry, I haven't talked to her for years," she admitted. "I suspect she's doing fine. I heard she and Neville want another child."

"Neville Longbottom?" Harry questioned.

Harry sank down to the bed and had a sick sort of grin on his face. The changes just kept coming and none of them arrived any easier than the previous ones. *Neville and Ginny?* Was that a possibility even in the real timeline? He had only suspected a romance between them once, but after Ginny started dating Michael Corner, he didn't think anything else of it.

"Listen, Harry, I'm going to start breakfast," Hermione said. She closed the medical book and placed it on the bedside table. She opened the drawer and pulled out another book. "This is my diary throughout the years. I dug it up out of storage for you earlier. It might help you remember." She extended her hand and presented him with it.

Harry took it into his possession. The cover was a beautiful blue embroidered with the title "Diary of Hermione J. Granger." It looked to be several years old and in need of some magical repair. Harry fanned through the pages, watching the scribbled words fly past his sight.

The bedroom door burst open, causing Harry to jump. He instinctively went for his wand, but couldn't find it on him. While the feeling of foreboding lingered, he relaxed as a miniature version of himself raced through into the bedroom. The boy stopped, stared at Harry, and shouted in joy.

"Dad, you're awake!"

Harry held out his arms to the child he recognized. Although the boy sounded differently, he still looked like his son. "Al, my boy!"

Albus suddenly stopped in mid-movement. His vibrant smile faded into a frown. The boy, who looked no older than twelve or thirteen, scowled and stood there curiously. "What did you call me, Dad?" he questioned.

Hermione, who had slipped a pair of pants on, walked towards the boy. "Don't mind your father, James. His memories are a little foggy right now. We're working on it." She bent down and kissed the boy on the forehead.

"C'mon, Mum, don't do that," he complained.

"Did Professor Johnson's letter arrive yet?" Hermione asked.

James shifted uncomfortably. "Yes," he said glumly. "I thought she'd be nice about it and let me off the hook. It wasn't my fault, you know..."

"I know," Hermione replied. "But you don't have to let Scorpius get to you like that. Why don't you try being nice to him for a change instead of hexing him every chance you get?"

"I hate Malfoy," James growled. "I'm not being nice to him, Mum. He's a Slytherin. I'm a Gryffindor..."

"I don't care what house you belong to," Hermione scolded. "Your father and I worked hard to stop these kinds of prejudices. Just because he's from Slytherin does NOT mean he's going to be a dark wizard."

James rolled his eyes. Hermione shot him a warning look and James yelped. He took off out of the room. Hermione turned back to Harry, who had been watching the scene with great interest. His son, his *new* son, was nothing like his other sons. It wasn't that the altered James, or Albus, or whoever was worse, but he didn't feel right. Maybe his genes and Hermione's genes...

He paused in mid-thought. Something occurred to him that hadn't before. He glanced up at Hermione. "That's our son, right?" Harry asked. "That means... you and me... *had sex*..."

Hermione nodded.

"...with *each other*?" Harry finished.

Hermione looked amused. "That is usually how it works," she said as she exited the room as well.

Harry once again shuddered at the thought. It wasn't that he found Hermione ugly, it was just the fact that she was... she was *Hermione*. It didn't feel right. It felt like... like incest...What had he gotten himself into?

He looked down at the book in his hands. The blue cover shimmered in the morning sun. All the answers were sitting in this diary, locked away between the pages. He knew the sheets of paper were always eager to reveal their secrets. The slightest bit of attention and they would spill their clandestine information. Harry breathed a heavy breath and opened up the diary of Hermione Jean Granger.

*The worst lies are the lies we tell ourselves.  
We live in denial of what we do, even what we think.  
We do this because we're afraid.  
We fear we will not find love,  
and when we find it we fear we'll lose it.  
We fear that if we do not have love we will be unhappy.*

*-Richard Bach*

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### **Author notes:**

I do not feel that the romances in canon were always meant to be (other than that's how JK Rowling wrote them). I feel that under different circumstances, all canon relationships could have taken a different course. Although I am a Harry/Ginny and Hermione/Ron supporter because I like the couples, I also feel that it was the correct choice according to each of the individual personalities and interests. I do not feel that Harry/Hermione would have worked in canon. In order for that relationship to develop healthily, one of them must have an altered personality.

In this particular timeline, that change is more in Harry than anyone. Harry is not a Horcrux. His personality, while remaining relatively the same, would have some changes. For one, he'd be easier to get along with. For another, he wouldn't be as angsty. The start of his personality overhaul started when he never played host to Voldy's soul.

Most of the development between Harry/Hermione will be inferred. I will be focusing on the changes with Ginny and Ron, and the consequences of those changes. Please keep in mind as you read this chapter that these are **real reasons** presented by anti-canon shippers.

Because Harry is reading the diary, we will not be learning exactly how Voldemort was defeated without Horcrux-Harry (or Horcrux-Ginny, for that matter). At this point, Harry is more concerned with how the heck he ended up with Hermione.



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## Chapter Twenty

### The Diary of Hermione Jean Granger

Fourteen-year-old Hermione Granger stood dumbfounded in the hospital wing at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. Her face was covered in sweat and dirt and tears. She hurt too much inside to think about wiping them away or washing her face. It couldn't be possible. Not this. Not at all.

She stared down at Ginny Weasley lying peacefully in her bed. If she didn't know any better, she would have said that nothing was wrong with the redheaded witch. After all, her breathing was average, the rise and fall of her chest did not constitute any abnormalities, and the eyes moved normally beneath her eyelids. She looked fine. But she wasn't. She couldn't be.

Hermione stifled a sob as she continued to stare. She hadn't realized how hard she was gripping an arm nor did she realize whose it was. She looked to her left and recognized Harry, who looked just as dumbfounded as she did. If she was hurting him, he didn't acknowledge it. He simply stared, refusing to tear his eyes away from the girl. He was trying desperately to make it not true.

But it was. Ginny had been kissed by a dementor. Their mission to save Buckbeak and Sirius had been a success, but at the expense of Ginny's soul. They tried to tell Dumbledore as they raced back to the room what had happened, but he had already guessed. He quieted them and locked the doors, ready to take on the changed timeline accordingly. That was ten seconds ago. But it felt like an eternity.

"What happened?" Ron called for the third time since they arrived.

It echoed in Hermione's head again, touching the parts that hurt the most. She didn't want to be the one to tell Ron what happened. She couldn't bear that look on his face. She couldn't be the one to hurt him like that. She looked again to Harry and she nudged him. He turned this time to face Ron with a distant look in his eyes.

“Harry, what the bloody hell happened to my sister?” Ron insisted.

Harry explained the best he could. He faltered, showing more emotion than he had ever shown. Hermione thought that he secretly cared for Ginny in a way not even he understood yet. Their lives had been so connected ever since they met. He had been trying to befriend the girl all year, but she was terrified of him. She really needed to get past the whole Boy-Who-Lived thing...

Hermione stopped herself because she was thinking about Ginny as if she would wake up and be normal.

Hermione looked at Ron's face. She couldn't read it. She had become good at realizing how he was feeling even if he was an idiot at times. But the look was foreign to her. It scared her.

Ron opened his mouth to speak but nothing came out for several seconds. He looked to his sister and then back to Harry. “I- I don't understand,” Ron whispered. “You were supposed to protect her. I mean, where- *where were you?*”

“Where was I?” Harry repeated quietly. “I... I was chasing Pettigrew.”

Ron raised himself to a sitting position. His whole body trembled as he spoke. “You were chasing that rat instead of protecting my sister?” he asked venomously.

Hermione let out a gasp and answered before Harry had a chance. “Ron, it was Pettigrew! We didn't know what was going to happen.”

“*Now* you stick up for my rat?” Ron hissed. “A little too late, don't you think?”

“How can you say that?” Hermione shouted. “He's a Death Eater!” She grabbed Harry's arm and beseeched him. “Harry, please, explain what happened.”

“Yeah, Harry,” Ron sneered. “Let's hear it. Explain why my sister is only worthy of your attention when it's too late.”

“Ron, shut your mouth,” Harry said, his teeth clenched. He was growing defensive.

But Ron didn't. “You were too busy for her until she was kidnapped by You-Know-Who!” Ron shouted. “You were too busy tonight to notice her until a bloody dementor was sucking out her soul. She's only important to you when she's about to die!”

“What about you?” Harry screamed back. “You didn't seem too concerned for Ginny last year either. You *knew* she was having a hard time adjusting, but you didn't care until she was taken into the Chamber. And you didn't even go with me! I had to save her!”

“Don't talk that way to me, Potter!” Ron growled.

“I'll talk any way I damn well please, Weasley!” Harry shouted. “At least I tried this year to be her friend. What did you tell her all year? ‘Go away, Ginny.’ ‘We're busy, Ginny.’ She was practically restarting her life and you barely paid any attention to her!”

“Stop screaming!” Hermione yelled, tears falling down her cheeks. “Fighting is not going to solve anything.”

“Maybe it will,” Ron concluded.

Hermione didn't like the sound of that. “Stop,” she commanded. “This is only tearing you both apart. You don't want that.”

Harry laughed pitifully. “That's what he wants,” he replied. “It's not like I go looking for trouble, Ron. If you think it's so dangerous being my friend, maybe you should rethink who you hang out with.”

“Might be a good idea,” Ron said. “At least my family will have a fighting chance at staying alive.”

Hermione squealed. “Ron, you don't mean that!”

“Take his side, then,” Ron grumbled. “You always do. Ron Weasley, the poor bloke, can't possibly have a good point. He's not famous enough.”

"I would never say that about you!" Hermione said. She was offended greatly. "You know I'm not like that. I can't believe you would even think it!"

"You want to be famous, do you?" Harry asked with an edge in his voice. "You know what I had to do to be famous, don't you?"

"Harry, don't," Hermione begged.

"Live," Harry finished. "I had to live, while my mum and dad were murdered. You want to be the Boy-Who-Lived, Ron? Be my guest."

"Who's shouting?"

Hermione turned quickly from the arguing boys and looked towards Ginny. Neither Harry nor Ron had heard the strange question. She was sure though that it came from this direction, but she might have been mistaken, after all it wasn't easy to listen while people were shouting. She might have been wrong about the voice, but she was sure she was seeing Ginny changing positions in the bed.

When the dementors arrived at Hogwarts, Hermione was quick to research all she could on the creatures, including their soul-sucking kiss. The effects were horrible. A person could live without their soul, but they might as well not. There was no sense of self left over, no feelings, no emotions, no speech patterns, no recognition of anyone, anything, or anyplace.

But the brown eyes of Ginny Weasley were open. They were looking at her and definitely showed recognition. Hermione waved and Ginny, much painfully, waved back. The girl's eyes shifted from her to the arguing boys.

"That doesn't give me Ginny back!" Ron screamed.

"Ron," Hermione said. "Harry."

"I know that!" Harry shouted, ignoring Hermione's call. "I don't need *you* reminding me that I destroyed- that it was my fault that-"

“Wow,” Ginny said rather loudly. The boys turned their attention to her. “I didn’t think you cared so much, Harry. And Ron, please shut it. You’re not helping this headache...”

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## **Last Day of Third Year**

*Ginny’s fine. I don’t really understand it. Harry and I have been over it again and again. We are almost 100 percent positive of what we saw. Ginny should not be standing, or laughing, or doing much of anything. Instead, she claims to feel better than she ever has. Could it have anything to do with what Pettigrew said? Horcrux, I think he mentioned. But why would he say anything?*

*Dumbledore believes us. I am beginning to think he was hoping for something like this to happen. It’s starting to scare me. He wanted to make certain as well that we did see what he thought we saw. When we told him about the word, he didn’t look surprised. He only paused for a second as if making a deduction and then continued speaking. He knows more than he was telling us, that’s for sure, but what? And why isn’t he telling us?*

*I tried searching through the library for any references to the word, but there were none. If I had more time and we weren’t leaving today, I’d search through the restricted section. It can’t be good. I mean, Dumbledore avoided the subject and I can’t find it anywhere in any of the approved magical spell books. It looks as if I’ll be spending a lot of time this summer researching.*

*On a more hopeful note, Harry and Ron aren’t fighting anymore. Although it could still be a bad thing because they’re ignoring their argument. I’ve talked briefly to both of them and they both said it was nothing to get bent up over. They both said they didn’t even mean what they said. I’m worried because I think they did. If they don’t acknowledge the problem now, then it’s going to pop back up and bite them in the arse when we can’t afford it happening.*

*Something else to note. I’ve been doing a lot of thinking after Ginny mentioned it this semester, and I thought I had a smart conclusion, but now I’m not so sure. Ron has a temper. If I can ever see myself*

*fancying Ron, I'm not sure if I could handle it. He's downright scary and he doesn't think about what he's saying when he's mad. I suppose that's more research I'll have to take care of.*

*Ginny and I have a lot to talk about.*

## **Fourth Year**

*November 20*

*Tomorrow Harry has to do the first task. I should be worried about whether or not the dragon will hurt him or if he'll be able to summon the broom correctly. I should be worried about his safety. I should be worried about him.*

*But what I'm worried about the most is Harry and Ron. They're fighting. It's worse than last year. This time, Ron nor Harry have spoken to each other for three weeks. I've been dividing my time up between both of them, but I'm ashamed to say that Ron is getting the short end of the stick right now. Harry just needs me more than Ron does. That doesn't make either of them very happy.*

*I feel for Ron, I really do. He's been outshined by his brothers all his life. Charlie has always been the bravest. Bill has always been the coolest. Percy, the smartest. The twins, the funniest. Even Ginny outshines him with how powerful she is. He just wants to prove that he's as good as everyone else and not "just another Weasley." I suppose I don't help very much when I talk about my grades in front of him. And then there's Harry, his best friend, who doesn't look for attention, but always finds it. Ron puts up with being in pretty long shadows, but I guess you can only bury that resentment for so long.*

*I can relate. I've always been outshined by all the pretty girls so I make up for it by trying to be the best at everything else. It's not easy and most of the time guys don't care whether or not you have straight A's. I can pretend it doesn't bother me, but it does. Ron and I are a lot more alike than most people realize. That's how I know Ron doesn't really believe that Harry would lie to him. He's just stubborn and prideful. Exactly like Harry is. I just wish the two of them would stop. Want to bet that Ron comes to his senses once he realizes how dangerous this tournament really is?*

*Ginny seems to be adjusting extremely well. It's almost as if her first year never happened and that incident last year is just a memory. She doesn't seem as moody either. We've been hanging out a lot more. She really is a wonderful person. If Harry ever stops looking at her as Ron's sister, I think they'd work. There's just one problem. She still can't function normally in front of him. She needs to stop looking at him as the Boy-Who-Lived and actually look at him as if he were normal. Harry is a great guy, but he's really not what everyone makes him out to be.*

*On a different note, why is Viktor Krum in the library right now?*

*December 15*

*I'm attempting not to cry right now. I've been putting too much thought into this stupid Yule Ball and all I'm doing is becoming a bumbling idiot. I'm too smart for this sort of thing to bother me, so why am I making such a big deal out of it? I refuse to become this petty girl who bases her entire life around whether or not the redheaded wizard will think I'm pretty enough to ask to the ball.*

*Okay, I just reread that last sentence and I'm not sure why I wrote it. Calm down, Hermione, calm down and let's think about this logically. There's got to be a plausible, reasonable, rational explanation why you wrote "redheaded wizard." Ginny can't be right about this, can she? Let's recap... I want to go to the ball. There are only two people I would really like to go with, but I'm not worked up over Harry. That leaves Ron. I got mad at him for wanting to take... oh no...*

*No no no no no*

*I've been waiting for Ro*

*Okay wow. I'm back. I had to stop writing because Viktor Krum just started talking to me.*

*Guess who has a date for the Yule Ball?*

*December 24*

*Never in my life have I ever been so angry with anyone! How dare he? Really, he had his chance to ask me plenty of times, but he didn't want to go with an "ugly" girl! He should be glad that I didn't have my wand because I would have hexed him into last week! Maybe then he'd have enough sense to see how much I wanted to go with him!*

*I can't even comprehend this. I've been putting myself out there since the Yule Ball was announced, making myself more than available for either one of them to ask me, and after I have a date, that's when he decides to get... I don't even know what to call it. It can't be jealousy. He's made that perfectly clear. He can't wrap his mind around the fact that someone WANTED to go with me for me, and not because he was trying to get information on Harry.*

*I told him that the next time there's a ball to ask me before someone else does. I'm not so sure if I want that to happen. After the reactions I've seen as of late, I'm not so sure if that's a good idea. He can't control his temper, he never thinks before he speaks, he's inconsiderate, and I don't think he really cares for me. I bet Mum would just say he's just being a boy. But Harry never treats me like that.*

### ***Fifth Year***

*October 5*

*I know I write so much in here about Ron, but I made an interesting observation today that I can't shake from my head. Ron found out about Ginny and Michael and he reacted in almost the same manner as he did when he was yelling at me for going with Viktor to the Yule Ball. I have to wonder if the feelings that he thinks he has for me are really romantic and not just as if I'm his sister.*

*December 23*

*I don't know how to write this without breaking into tears again. Mr. Weasley died while on duty for the Order.*

*January 30*



*I can't get through to Ron or Ginny. Every time I try, they refuse to acknowledge what I'm talking about. They've walled their emotions in and I can't break it. If I press on, they explode with anger and scream at me until I can't stop crying. Harry's not having any luck either. He's a lot more subtle than I am, but they don't see a difference. The only thing that is different is that Harry won't take the screaming. He screams right back. I'm really worried about this. I don't know how this is ever going to fix itself.*

*June 4*

*There's too much death going on in such a short amount of time. First Mr. Weasley, now Tonks. It hurts inside. Even more because she fell through that veil and there's not body, no real closure. She only comforting thought is that she died as a hero, saving Sirius and Harry from death.*

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## **Sixth Year**

Seventeen-year-old Hermione Granger stepped onto the cool dungeon floor. She had forgotten her potions book in Slughorn's class. She leisurely stepped towards the door and placed her hand on the large, wooden door to knock. It was open a crack and she heard voices from inside. Instead of knocking, she leaned closer to listen.

"Miss Weasley, you really didn't need to stay behind and help clean up," Slughorn bellowed, "but I appreciate it nevertheless."

"It's my pleasure, professor," Ginny said. "After all, you've helped me a lot this year."

"Ahhh," Slughorn mused. "I thought that might be why you were staying behind today. I'm interested to hear how the theory went."

Hermione leaned closer to the crack. This conversation was a curious one. She straightened her bag against her shoulder and continued listening.

“Not too bad,” Ginny replied. “It’s taking much longer than I thought it would. And it’s having some collateral damage I wasn’t expecting. If I ever have to kiss Draco Malfoy again, it would be too soon.”

“That’s to be expected when you’re dealing with Amortentia,” Slughorn said.

Hermione stifled a gasp. She quickly pulled a hand over her mouth and shook her head quickly. She knew Harry was paying much more attention to Ginny over the past school term and she did think it was strange that it happened arbitrarily, but she didn’t think any more of it. She had been too busy herself playing these stupid, emotional games with Ron. She was sure she had dropped several levels of intelligence by just participating in this manipulative back-and-forth.

The door suddenly opened and Hermione was unable to hide the look of utter horror on her face. Ginny looked at her curiously and then grinned as wide as Slughorn’s belly. “Hello, Hermione,” she said sweetly. “Have you seen Harry?”

“Ginny, I heard what you’re doing,” Hermione said in a hoarse voice. “This isn’t right.”

“I’m not doing anything wrong,” Ginny replied, swinging her hair over her head. “You said yourself that love potions weren’t dark magic. And your word is law, if I remember correctly. I have you to thank anyhow. You told me I need to stop being some little girl with a crush if I ever wanted Harry to notice me.”

“I didn’t mean you should drug him!”

“I’m not,” Ginny said annoyingly. She leaned closer, presenting Hermione with a whiff of her neck. “I’m wearing it as a perfume. It was Slughorn’s idea. It doesn’t work the same way as consuming it. So I’m not really doing anything to him.”

“Yes, you are!” Hermione shouted now. “Each love potion has to be fixed to attract the user to the giver. You have his attractions bottled up in your neck. You’re manipulating him.”

"I'm tweaking the circumstances," Ginny said, emulating Hermione's own words. "Not unlike what you did for Ron at Quidditch practices."

Hermione was fuming. "That was completely different," Hermione shouted.

Ginny shrugged it off. "I'm not sure why you're so angry," she said. "It's not like it's a walk in the park. I have to deal with the side effects. How was I supposed to know Dean was attracted to the same things as Harry? Oh well, he's proven to be useful."

"You're using Dean, too?" Hermione sputtered.

"Don't sound surprised," Ginny said calmly. "I'm using your advice. What did you tell me? Date other people. It's working, too. Harry has never been so jealous."

"That's not what I meant and you know it!" Hermione screamed. She turned from the girl and started to storm away. Ginny grabbed her arm. "Let go of me."

"You can't tell him," Ginny said quickly. It was the first time in their conversation that Ginny actually showed fear. "I need him, Hermione. We're supposed to be together, I know it. You can't take that away from me."

Hermione wrenched away from Ginny's arm. "You've changed, Ginny. Ever since you lost your dad—"

"Don't bring my father into this!" Ginny shrieked.

"Ever since you lost your dad, you don't care what you do to other people," Hermione finished.

"I'm just tired of not getting what I want," Ginny seethed. "I'm not that timid, little girl anymore. I'll do anything to be with Harry. I love him."

"That's not love!" Hermione said. She turned again and left. "I'm telling Harry," she called her back. The only sound from behind her was a howl of anguish.

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*June 5*

*We had Dumbledore's funeral today. I tried so hard to keep it together, but I couldn't do it. There were too many people crying around me. He was the only one that could really make sense of all this. Now I just feel lost. How are we going to win this war now?*

*Harry is taking it the hardest. He blames himself. I suppose some things will never change. I think he's also having a hard time accepting the fact that Ginny was magically seducing him. He keeps saying that maybe if he had paid more attention to her, she wouldn't have needed a reason to do what she did. In a way, I think he might be disappointed. Either way, Ginny isn't speaking to any of us, and I doubt we'll be speaking to her any time soon.*

*I've also reached another decision. Harry isn't coming back. He's off to finish the work that Dumbledore started. He wasn't about to allow me to come with him, but I convinced him that he needs me. He's always needed me. I'm not sure where this is all going to lead, but I have a feeling it won't be a stay at the Leaky Cauldron.*

*Surprisingly, Ron and I have put our differences aside and he hasn't mentioned a word about the Ginny-scandal. He's coming with Harry and me. I suppose it can't harm anything that he's coming with us, but I really don't think we'll need him. I honestly believe he'll only be holding us back. I'm going to keep a tally on how much he'll complain about our food situation. And with his temper, I should start taking bets on when he'll walk out on us.*

*I'm terrified.*

---

*"I get it. You chose him."*

*"Ron, no- please- come back, come back!"*

*She was quicker than he was. Hermione lunged out of the tent and caught Ron's arm just as he was about to pass through the protective*

wards that would cause him to be able to evaporate. She held on tight and spun Ron around.

"Don't touch me," Ron growled. He wrenched his arm away from Hermione, causing her to stumble backwards a few steps. "Why can't you ever take my side? You never back me up. I'm always wrong. *I'm right* about this and you damn well know it."

"Come back inside," Hermione pleaded. "We'll work this out."

"I'm done working this out!" Ron screamed. "That's all we've been doing for weeks. 'Working it out.'"

"You're not talking about the search," Hermione said.

"Maybe I'm not!" Ron screamed. "I've tried to make this work between you and me, but you obviously can't. You chose Harry over me. It's always going to be that way. I should have seen it coming."

The rain continued to beat upon them. Hermione's hair was losing its bushiness and turning straight from the water. The difference between rain and tears was indistinguishable.

"It's supposed to be you and me!" Ron shouted.

"What do you mean *supposed to be*?"

"Don't you feel it, Hermione?" Ron said with a scowl on his face.

"I don't know what you're talking about," Hermione replied uneasily. "Won't you please come back inside?"

Ron breathed in and released a long, angry breath. He placed his hands on his head and started trembling. "SHUT UP! I'M NOT STEPPING A FOOT BACK INSIDE THAT TENT WITH *HIM!*"

"Ron-

"I'M THROUGH LISTENING TO YOU OR CARING WHAT YOU HAVE TO SAY!"

Hermione scoffed this time. "You never cared-"

“AND I’M DONE LOVING A BOSSY, BUSHY-HAIRED, UGLY, LITTLE MUDBLOOD!”

Hermione was about to grab for Ron’s sleeve again before he uttered that word. She dropped her hand quickly to her side and stared in disbelief. *“What did you call me, Ronald Weasley?”*

Ron’s eyes were filled with rage; no regret on his face. “You heard me,” Ron said, a snarl escaping his lips. He turned from her and was gone.

It was late. There was silence in the tent, eerily creeping around the room, save but the steady droplets of rain beating upon the fabric. The wind howled, providing more noise to drown out the uncomfortable silence.

Hermione stood there, allowing the rain to soak her. Several minutes ago, she had jumped from her seat to follow Ron into the forest. That was the right thing to do, find him and bring him back. But for what reason?

“Well,” Harry whispered from behind her, “are you leaving or staying?”

Hermione touched the tent flap lightly. Why had she even risen? Ron was the one with the problem, complaining every chance he got. Sure, Hermione agreed that the journey wasn’t what she had expected, but she had agreed to stick by Harry’s side, no matter the cost. She had told Ron that, but he threw her words back in her face, just as Ginny had manipulated her words to suit her own goals.

Hermione, feeling lost, slowly entered the tent and sat upon the closest chair. She swallowed the hurt that had built up in her throat. When she finally looked at Harry, she expected to see an angry face, a look of fury pounding within the emerald eyes, but she was surprised to find that he appeared relieved. She had stayed faithful, as she knew she would, and Ron had abandoned, as she knew he would.

“Thanks,” Harry said.

"I said I'd help," Hermione said with tears in her eyes. "You need me."

They stared at each other for several seconds, the lantern flickering, the rain falling. Harry looked away. Hermione stared into the miniscule fire.

"What did he mean?" Harry questioned. "That you chose me?"

Hermione rolled his eyes. "He's always thought I fancied you," she answered softly. "It started when we were younger, he used to make hints about you and me."

"You and me, huh?" Harry said, grinning.

"Silly, I know," Hermione muttered. "It would never work. I'm much too upright."

"Yeah, and I'm too hot-headed."

"You think of me as a sister."

Silence. Rain.

"You know, you really *have* loosened up over the years," Harry said.

"And you've gotten much better at controlling those tantrums," Hermione replied.

"And I've never *really* considered you much of a sister."

Hermione stared towards Harry. His face was half-concealed in shadow and his eye that she could see was reflecting the light. From somewhere deep within, a feeling stirred, sending shivers up and down her spine.

Quickly, she said, "Well, I'm off to bed."

"Yeah, me too."

---

Harry skimmed through the diary, stopping every few pages to read a little more when something caught his eye. At last, he needed to stop reading. As he placed the book upon the bedside stand, he leaned against the headboard and sighed deeply.

It was difficult for him to read this life. It didn't seem real to him, but there it was, written plain and simple as if no other reality ever existed. He closed his eyes and thought back to the life he had left behind. A wife, four children, and a place he could look forward to. He could still see Ginny gazing at him with that hard, blazing look he was so fond of.

He thought back to the diary entries. He could follow the subtle disintegration of Ron and Ginny's friendship with him through the years starting with the night of the Dementor's Kiss. When Mr. Weasley died, their personalities took a heavy beating. Their future with love and happiness with whom they were originally betrothed to seemed to fall apart at that moment.

He thought of Ron. Ron could certainly be a jerk sometimes, but the death of his father brought that out and enhanced it. He had never expected such polluted words to touch Ron's lip, especially when he had defended Hermione's honor on more than one occasion when the same phrase was used.

He thought of Ginny. She had certainly been starstruck with him, but she had always been rational about it. She might have been a little obsessive when she was younger, but she grew out of it, but the death of Mr. Weasley... he paused to take a deep breath.

He thought of him and Hermione. Their love had grown out of their strong friendship, fueled by the failed relationships that they were expected to partake in. The resentment of being hurt caused them to cling to each other. Eventually they interpreted their feelings as love.

And then Harry thought about the war. Without access to Voldemort's mind, the war lasted longer than it originally had, killing more people in the process. He was excited to learn that Sirius had not died at the Ministry, but was horrified to learn that he never survived the Battle for Hogwarts. Neither did Remus. Neither did Bill. Neither did Fleur.



Harry shook his head. He grabbed the diary again and opened to a page closer to the back. He was staring at an entry that was scribbled out. Harry located his wand and carefully relieved the page of its untidy mess until the words were clear on the page.

*I am happy. I really am. I love Harry and I would never trade this life for anything. I shouldn't even be writing this right now, especially since tomorrow is my wedding day.*

*Sometimes I feel I'm not making the right decision. I feel like there's this whole part of me that calls out to be known and I want to find it, but there's no place to look. I feel like I'm missing something, or something needs to be added, or... I don't know. Marrying Harry feels right, yet not right at the same time. I just want this emptiness to stop.*

Harry closed the book again.

He looked out the window towards the sky. The sun was brighter now and a little higher. He watched several birds fly by his view, hearing them whistle as they perched themselves in a tree. It was a nice day.

A nice enough day to make a couple visits to some redheads.

Love vanquishes time.  
To lovers, a moment can be eternity,  
eternity can be the tick of a clock.  
*Across the barriers of time and the ultimate destiny, love persists,  
for the home of the beloved, absent or present, is always in the mind  
and heart.*  
*Absence does not diminish love.*

-Mary Parrish

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## Chapter Twenty-One

### Conversations

Harry walked into the kitchen to find Hermione and James. His wife was tending to something on the stove. The smell wafted towards him, teasing his nostrils, and reminding him that food was still something he needed. James was just finishing a glass of orange juice. His son wiped his mouth, set the cup down, and smiled at him.

"Dad, do I really have to go back to school today?" James asked.

Hermione whipped around at a frightening speed. "James Sirius Potter, we have already had this conversation. You will *not* play your father against me. Now get to the fireplace and get to school."

James growled loudly and pushed his chair back violently. He accidentally knocked over his glass in the process. Without bothering to pick it up, he rushed from the room. Hermione watched him go and when he was out of the kitchen, she turned back to Harry.

"What's up with him?" Harry asked.

"He's been home since you went missing," Hermione answered. "I told him that once we knew you were okay, he had to go back to school. He just doesn't want to serve that detention."

"For that fight with Scorpius?" Harry questioned and Hermione nodded. "I take it this isn't the first time?"

Hermione shook her head. "I don't understand it," she said. "They've hated each other since they first stepped foot into Hogwarts. I guess maybe it's you and Draco all over again." She turned back to the stove and talked over her shoulder. "I won't let James hear this, but that kid deserves the hexing James gives him."

Harry chuckled a little bit.

"But that still doesn't mean he should do it," Hermione went on. "I refuse to have my child participate in a rivalry like that after you and I worked so hard to bring peace to this world."

"I had one," Harry said. "I turned out fine."

"Don't you see?" Hermione said, turning back. "That's exactly the kind of attitude that breeds darkness. If it's always all the Hogwarts houses verses Slytherin, everyone is going to suffer. Those kids are our future. They're going to be running the Ministry. You and I can't live forever."

"Technically we could."

Hermione frowned. "Don't joke like that." She placed her hands on her hips. "You're missing the point." She turned back to the stove and grabbed the handle of the skillet. Turning towards the table with it, she said, "Listen to me, rambling on about this when I should be concerned about you. How are you feeling? Sit down and eat."

Harry took his seat and Hermione scooped scrambled eggs onto his plate. "I'm feeling fine," Harry answered. "The diary helped," he lied. "I still feel like something is missing, though."

Hermione peered at him curiously before summoning the orange juice. "You should visit St. Mungo's today, just to make sure," she said, pouring him a glass. "If you want, I could come with you."

Harry shook his head as he took a bite of his eggs. He hadn't realized how hungry he was. He quickly ate several bites before saying, "No, you probably have loads of work to catch up on."

Hermione agreed. "Truthfully, yes. The Wizard-Centaur relations are on the verge of breaking, not to mention Draco Malfoy is trying to block the newest house-elf legislation." She didn't notice Harry's grim face at the mention of a Malfoy in the Ministry. "Do you have any other plans?"

"I'm not sure yet," Harry once again lied, shoving the last bit of eggs from his plate into his mouth. "I'm sure I'll be around."

"For Merlin's sake, Harry, you finished that plate of eggs in nine seconds," Hermione said. "You're making me feel like I really *should* be married to Ron."

Harry didn't respond. He simply scooped more eggs onto his plate from the skillet.

Hermione was putting on her coat. "Let me know if there are any leads on what happened to you," she said, gathering up her items and sticking them in her bag. She pulled a newspaper away from the stack of parchment she was putting away. "By the way, you made the front page again." She tossed the rolled-up *Daily Prophet* to him. "Skeeter had a field day with you."

Harry unrolled the paper to the front page. There he was, as large as the paper would allow, splashed across the front with the headline "Savior of Wizarding World Losing His Mind?"

Hermione pushed the paper down to look at him. "Tell me again, why did you stun Dudley?" she asked.

"Didn't you say he wasn't there?" Harry said.

"No, I didn't say that," Hermione replied. "He was part of the search party that was looking for you."

"I thought he had a wand and was trying to kill me."

Hermione giggled. "A wand?" she repeated. "It was a flashlight, Harry. Any reason why you thought he was trying to kill you?"

"That was part of the dream," Harry answered.

Hermione nodded. "Don't let Rita hear you say that," she advised. "She'll convince everyone you really *are* losing your mind." She leaned forward and pecked him on the lips. He resisted pulling away, but luckily she didn't linger. She said goodbye and when she was out of the room, he grabbed his napkin and wiped his mouth.

Harry spread the paper on the table, reading through over the headline again. Maybe Rita Skeeter was right. Maybe he was losing his mind. Was it possible that he had dreamt up the whole ordeal? He placed his head in his hands and rubbed his temples. How could he prove to himself at least that what he was experiencing was completely real?

He looked over towards the coat rack and noticed the black cloak that he had procured from the Ministry in his last journey through time. He pushed back his chair and stepped towards it. Inside, he hoped to find a picture. He swallowed a lump of apprehension and reached into the pocket. His fingers brushed against a rough piece of paper and he breathed a sigh of relief.

He pulled it out and read the message on the back again. He slowly turned it over and stared once again into the faces of his family. He wasn't crazy. He was just on a crazy adventure. As he smiled back at his wife, he whispered, "I'm coming to see you, Ginny."

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Harry paced in front of a door about an hour and a half later. It was fairly easy to find the Longbottom house, especially since he had so many contacts in the Ministry. They owned a pleasant flat above the Leaky Cauldron. After he found the address, he immediately Apparated to the apartment. He was excited, but extremely nervous.

He stopped, took a deep breath, and knocked on the door.

There was a commotion from inside. After several seconds, the door flew open. Standing there was a young girl that strongly resembled George and Angelina's daughter Roxanne. She had the same blazing red hair her father had and the same dark skin and brown eyes of her mother. She was also about the same age, nine years old if he had to guess.

"Hi," she said, waving at him. She looked at him curiously and then her eyes flickered up to his scar. "Are you...? YOU'RE *HARRY POTTER!*" she squealed, covering her mouth. "Oh!" She opened her mouth and started incoherently rambling.

"Roxanne, who is it?" said a small voice. Another redheaded child walked up.

"Willy, do you know who this is?" Roxanne whispered.

Harry smiled at the children. "Hello, kids, can I ask-"

"AUNT GINNY!" Roxanne screamed, running back into the house. "COME TO THE DOOR! COME TO THE DOOR!"

*So much for subtlety*, Harry thought. He tried in vain to calm the wildness of his hair, but the unruly mess could not be tamed.

"What are you doing here?" Willy asked.

"I went to school with Ginny," Harry answered.

"You know Aunt Ginny?" Willy asked in disbelief. "No way! Do you know Fred? He's me dad."

"I do," Harry replied. "I-"

He stopped. Coming to the door was the most satisfying sight he had ever seen. It didn't matter that the woman looked as if she had just woken up, her hair disheveled, or that she wore a pair of torn jeans. It didn't even matter that she simply stared at him in disbelief as she was flanked by Roxanne and two more young redheads and yet another one crying in her arms.

"Hello, Ginny," he said weakly.

"Roxanne, take Lucy and put her in her cot," Ginny said, never taking her eyes off Harry. Roxanne reached out and took the baby from her. She hurried away. The rest of the kids stared at Harry in awe.

"Do you have time to talk?" Harry asked.

"I sure do!" said Willy.

"Shush, William," Ginny scolded, still staring at Harry even though she had yet to actually speak to him. "Um, Harry, hi... this is really... *unexpected*..." She nervously laughed. "You said, you said you want to *talk*?"

Harry nodded. "If you have time."

"Of course," she blurted out. She then looked around at all the children. "Actually, I'm on babysitting duty right now, but only for a little longer. Can you meet me down in the pub? I mean, do you mind waiting because if you have somewhere else to be..."

"I'll be in the Leaky Cauldron then," Harry said, stepping back.

"Right then, the Leaky Cauldron," Ginny repeated. She frowned and then placed her hand on the door, shutting it.

Before Harry left, he heard the children shouting his name.

Harry wasn't sure how much time he had before Ginny would be arriving to meet him. In all honesty, he would wait all day if he had to. It wasn't like there was any other place he had to be. He checked his watch to see if it was close to lunch, but it wasn't. He wasn't going to be wasting time eating. Maybe he'd find someone he knew in the pub.

Unfortunately that was exactly what he found. No sooner did he enter the pub did he hear a familiar voice.

"Well, if it isn't Harry Potter."

Harry turned towards the nearest seat at the bar. Sitting there with a mug full of purple liquid was a redheaded man. He immediately smiled and thrust out his hand to greet him. "Ron Weasley!" he said.

Ron stared down at the extended hand and then looked back up, ignoring it. "What do you want me to do with that, Potter?" he asked.

Harry took a stool beside Ron. "It's good to see you, Ron."

Ron laughed heartedly. "I get it," he said. "This is some kind of outreach program you're doing for the poor. Well, I'm not interested."

"Will you just listen for a second?" Harry said, growing a bit annoyed. "I just want to talk to you, Ron."

"We haven't talked in twenty years, Potter. What the bloody hell are you doing in London talking to me?" Ron asked. He chugged back some of the drink. "I get it, you're on Auror business?"

"NO!" Harry screamed, gritting his teeth. "I'm not on Auror business. I'm not giving damn donations to the poor. I'm here because you're my friend and I want to talk to you."

"Your *friend*?" Ron spit the words out. "You have an awful definition of the word friend. A *friend* doesn't steal his best mate's girl right from under his nose."

"Steal his-? *What*?" Harry called. "And you call *yourself* a friend? *You* abandoned *us*, remember? *I* wasn't the one to call Hermione a Mud-*that word*!"

Ron threw his hands up in the air. "Well, preach on, oh mighty Boy-Who-Lived, moral compass for all Wizard-kind. Excuse me if I don't sit and listen to your holier-than-thou attitude!" Ron downed the last bit of his drink and slammed it onto the bar. He stood up and leaned close to Harry's face. "Next time you want to talk, find yourself someone who cares."

"Go on, leave, that's what you're best at, isn't it?" Harry called after his friend. The door slammed, and Harry immediately regretted the argument. He slammed his own fist against the bar.

"Don't worry about him, Harry," said a charming voice from behind the bar.

Harry turned to the voice. Hannah Abbott was standing there, cleaning out a dirty glass with a cloth. "Morning, Hannah," he greeted glumly.



"Morning, Harry," she replied. "Like I said, don't take what he says personally. Every now and then, he'll get into a fight or an argument with someone at the bar. Most of the time he's back in here hitting on me the next day as if nothing happened."

"So Ron never got married or anything?" Harry asked.

Hannah shook her head. "He dated Luna for awhile, but that didn't last very long," she answered. "Always focused on Hermione. He seems to think they were meant to be." She placed the clean glass back on the bar. "He's a good man, just misguided. Life didn't happen the way he had planned. Didn't happen the way I planned either, come to think of it."

Harry nodded. "You mean with Neville?"

Hannah stared at him. "You weren't this perceptive during Hogwarts, Harry," she said softly. She started wiping his section of the bar. "But you're right, I was very fond of Neville, starting when he led the DA. I never told anyone that." She laughed. "I never expected to be thirty-eight, single, and the owner of a hotel where I run the bar because I can't find decent help."

"I'm sorry, Hannah."

"That's neither here nor there," she said, and laughed again. "Look at me, telling you my problems, when usually I'm the one listening," she said. "So who are you meeting?"

Harry was taken aback. "How do you know I'm meeting anyone?"

Hannah looked up as several people entered the pub. "Well, for one, I don't remember the last time you stepped foot in here."

Harry agreed and considered not revealing who he was meeting. Ultimately he shrugged and decided it wouldn't hurt anything. "Ginny Longbottom," Harry answered.

Hannah opened her mouth agape. "Wow, you on a Weasley kick or something?" she asked. She reached beneath the bar and grabbed

two empty glasses. "We can start by ordering your drinks. What'll it be, Harry?"

A few minutes later, Harry placed himself in the empty booth. It was in the corner, out of anyone's immediate attention. He preferred it this way, the only reason people would be able to find was if they were purposefully looking for him. He set his drink in front of him on a coaster and then the second drink on the opposing side.

He fished into his pocket and extracted the photo from the bottom. This action was beginning to become second nature to him. He had come to memorize the details of his family. Ginny smiled, followed by Lily wrinkling her nose, and then Harry placed his arm around his wife. One, two, three, four times James blinked. Albus was distracted by something off to the right. Finally, they paused to pose and the cycle started over again.

He positioned his index finger over Ginny's hair and rubbed it gently, hoping he'd be able to feel the softness through the paper. He couldn't. He traced the crease instead that ran between Ginny and himself to the edge of the photo. He counted three rips, just as many as there were last time.

How long had it been? Physically, he felt he had been separated from his family for years, but literally, it had only been four days. Of course, they weren't consecutive twenty-four hour periods, but he had only been away a short amount of time. His body yearned to see them all again, but right now it was full of anxiety and excitement for the opportunity awaiting him. He was going to be talking to Ginny Longbottom.

It sounded strange in his mind. No matter how odd it felt, he was sure this conversation was going to be a strange one as well. He hoped it would go better than the one with Ron did. He hoped Ginny wasn't the same as she had been in the diary. He wanted her to be happy and he prayed she was, but what would that mean for any more decisions concerning changing the timeline? As long as Ginny was comfortable, did he really care about his own happiness?

But secretly, he was ashamed to admit that he hoped in a small way that she wasn't happy.

He glanced over to the bar. Several patrons were seated on stools, talking low to each other. One man with shaggy brown hair was turned to the side, chatting up an attractive woman. She touched his leg lightly, then discreetly slipped off a ring from her finger and placed it inside her purse. Beside them, a large burly man that reminded Harry of Hagrid chugged back a full mug of some kind of liquid that was smoking.

But it was the last man on the end of the bar who called for Harry's attention. He couldn't see the man's face, but he wore a long, black cloak. The hood hid the color of the man's hair. Harry wondered if it was Cronus. Would the crazed version of himself be aware of the newest changes that had occurred? Since Harry had returned to an earlier time than which he left, maybe Cronus was still waiting for Harry to return, days after their initial meeting.

The sound of the door opening interrupted his thoughts. He listened carefully. Light footsteps entered. He recognized the pattern of steps. He quickly slipped the photo away as the person walked towards him. He waited until she was closer to turn and greet her.

When he stood, his breath caught in his throat. Ginny looked stunning, far more visually-pleasing than she had looked earlier. She wore a button-down red sweater with form-fitting black pants. Her hair was no longer unruly, but rather sleek and shiny, hanging delicately upon her shoulders. And her lips, painted with a deep shade of red, begged to be investigated in closer proximity. It took all of Harry's willpower to resist kissing her.

She smiled casually and slid into the booth across from where he was sitting. She placed her purse beside her. She then noticed the glass sitting before her. "Is this for me?" she asked.

Harry nodded, sliding it a few centimeters closer. "Pumpkin juice, no ice, with a squirt of lemon," he answered, noticing her bewildered face. Obviously this needed further explanation. "It's your favo-"

"Favorite," she finished, giving him a curious look. "I know." She wrapped her small hands around the glass, raised it towards her mouth, and took a long sip of the liquid.

Harry watched intently. He envied the glass.

Ginny set the drink back in its original position. She waited for Harry to say something, but when he didn't, she stared down at her hands and started to pick at a loose hangnail. She gave a small cough and looked towards the bar.

She was uncomfortable with the situation, Harry surmised. *He* didn't mind the silence. It was more than enough to have her here, right in front of him, happy, breathing, and alive. He would be content staying in her company just like this all night. He half-grinned as she picked up her drink again and took another long sip.

"So," she said, placing the glass down again, "what did you want to talk about, Harry?"

Harry shrugged. "I'm not sure," he said. "There's a lot of places to start. It's been a long time."

"Twenty-one years," Ginny said.

Harry nodded. "Feels like just yesterday we were still at Hogwarts," he said. "I can't believe it's been that long, can you?"

Ginny didn't look as if she wanted to talk about the school days. She cleared her throat and asked, "How is your son?"

She was choosing neutral territory. Harry could handle that, at least until she was a little more comfortable being around him. "James?" Harry questioned, smiling. "You know how kids are. He's a good kid, but he's fighting too much."

"Neville mentioned he was having trouble with some students fighting," Ginny replied. "Do you know what's wrong?"

"Well, you know Malfoy's son?"

"Scorpius, right?"

"That's the one," Harry said, secretly thanking Hermione for having this conversation with him. "They've made it their own personal goals from day one to make each other's life as miserable as possible."

"Like father, like son," Ginny said.

Harry chuckled at the statement. She had said the exact same thing when Albus was initially having trouble with Scorpius. Ginny smiled. She and Harry locked eyes and then she did something that made Harry's heart soar- she blushed.

As Harry grinned, she kept talking to cover up her embarrassment. "Neville and Frank, er... I mean..." She paused, closed her eyes, and sighed loudly. "I'm sorry."

"Don't be," Harry said softly, admiring her crimson skin. "Go on."

She opened her eyes and Harry found her brown pupils just as engaging as he always had. She nodded and continued. "Neville and I have been fortunate enough that Frank has no problems with fighting," Ginny said. "However, he does have Neville's problem of being shy and clumsy."

"You'd think with a mother as forward as you are, he'd be all set," Harry said, then realized he might have said the wrong thing. She was scowling slightly. "I meant that as a compliment. You've always had such confidence in yourself."

Ginny gripped her glass and took another sip, giving Harry an inquisitive look.

"But if he really is like Neville, I suspect he'll grow out of it when he gets older," Harry suggested. "He might even get a chance to lead a school army."

Ginny contemplated Harry's words. "I never thought of it like that."

"I heard you and Neville want another one," Harry said. "Any luck yet?"

Ginny sighed. "No, unfortunately," she replied. "Mum has been hinting... well, not really *hinting*, more like demanding that I have another one. She keeps reminding me how many kids my brothers have. It's just not a good time. Neville can't be around because of his teaching and I... well..."

"What is it?" Harry asked.

Ginny waved her hand as if to dismiss the idea. "It's silly. I'd rather not say."

"Seriously, what is it?" Harry asked. He shot her a questioning look, one that had a tendency to melt her stubbornness more often than not. He wondered if she would still be subject to his persuasive charm.

She was. "Oh alright," she said, declaring defeat. "I really want to start playing Quidditch professionally again," Ginny admitted. "I know, don't laugh. Foolish ambitions of a washed-out has-been, right?"

"No, it's not," Harry replied much to his own amusement. So much had changed, Harry realized, but so much had stayed the same. He recalled Ginny expressing the same desire before they realized she was pregnant with Dora. "You were a great player. I don't blame you for wanting to get back in the air."

"It's not that I want to stop being a mother," Ginny said. "I *love* being a mother. I just wish I could do both."

"I understand," Harry said. "Up there, it's almost like you're free. Nothing can reach you, not even the nightmares."

Ginny slowly smiled. "Yeah, *exactly*," she said. "How did you know that?"

Harry shrugged. He couldn't very well say that they had that conversation before, because in this world, they hadn't. He could just offer the most truthful response. "I feel the same way," he said simply.

Another silence passed between them, but this one was not an uncomfortable one. Harry heard chairs moving and he looked towards the bar. The shaggy-haired man and the attractive woman

had stood up to leave. He was leading her away with a hand on her lower back. The Hagrid-look-alike was downing another smoking beverage. Cronus, or at least that's who Harry thought it was, was no longer sitting there. Harry wondered where he ran off to.

"So what about you?" Ginny asked, breaking the silence.

Harry turned his head back to her. "What do you mean?"

"You and Hermione," Ginny replied. "Surely the two of you have talked about another child as well."

"We have before," Harry replied, attempting to take some truth from his previous reality and apply to this one. "But we had enough trouble as it was conceiving. Her mom had the same problem. That's why Hermione is an only child."

"I'm sorry," Ginny replied. "I never knew that."

"Not too many people do," Harry said. "Hermione took your excuse. You would have kept on playing for the Harpies if you didn't had Jam-, er, Frank. Hermione avoided the questions, saying she, too, was focused on her career. There's only so much house-elf laws can do to appease a woman who desperately wants to be a mother."

"And Hermione always was the motherly type," Ginny agreed. "I remember her always on you and Ron's cases about homework."

"Just homework?" Harry asked.

Ginny smiled. "I see your point," she said. She absentmindedly reached up to play with a strand of her hair. "I bet she was worried sick about your disappearance."

"You heard about that then?" Harry asked.

"Who hasn't?" Ginny asked rhetorically. "It was all over the news. 'Massive search parties all over the country for the wizarding world's savior.' Is it true you stunned your cousin?"

“Dudley? It’s true,” Harry replied. “I thought he was going to kill me. I could have sworn he had a wand. Turned out it was a flashlight...” Harry saw her confused face. “Oh, right. It’s a Muggle machine that creates light. I think your dad might have had one-” he stopped as soon as he realized what he had said. “Sorry, Ginny.”

Ginny half-smiled. “I’m not fragile, Harry,” Ginny said. “You can talk about my dad. You’re right, I think he did have one. Anyway, can I ask where you were for six days? The papers weren’t very clear.”

“That’s the million-galleon question,” he said. He leaned back in the booth and ran a hand through his hair. “In a few words, I was in a better, happier place than I am now. In more words, I wouldn’t even know where to start.”

Ginny arched her eyebrows. “A better, happier place?” she repeated. “I don’t know if its my place to ask, but aren’t you happy now?”

“Now?” Harry said, looking at the redheaded witch with beautiful milky skin and prominent freckles. “Right now in this moment, yes,” Harry said, watching her reaction. “But life in general, I’m still working on that one. Since you asked me a personal question, I think I should have the opportunity to ask you one myself.”

“Do you?” Ginny asked playfully. “Depends on the question, but fire away.”

“How did you and Neville end up together?”

Ginny shifted uncomfortably. She averted her eyes away from Harry’s and muttered, “Harry, that whole stage of my life is too hard to talk about.”

“Neville’s a good guy, isn’t he?” Harry asked.

“You misunderstood me,” Ginny said. “I meant that it’s too hard to talk about to you. You don’t want to hear it.”

“I wouldn’t have asked if I didn’t want to hear it,” Harry said.



Ginny was still hesitant. She breathed in a long, heavy breath and then released it. "You're going to think less of me, if that's even possible," she said. "Are you sure?"

Harry didn't say anything. Ginny went on.

"There were stories of you growing up, heroic stories, grand fairy tales of the Boy-Who-Lived," Ginny started. "Mum used to tell me all kinds of adventures of Harry Potter. There were other fairy tales, but none that were my favorite."

"And then you met him?" Harry asked.

"Yeah, I did," Ginny replied. "Now, I was usually this clever, little thing. You know, funny, fiery, and sweet, but when I met... when I met you, Harry, I stopped being those things."

"You had a crush on me," Harry added.

"You could call it that," Ginny said. "But I didn't understand what was happening. I denied it for years. I was even getting other guys to notice me, handsome, strong blokes, but never Harry Potter. Never." She paused and looked away. "When my dad died, I guess I kind of snapped. I focused everything into getting you. I kept telling myself that if you were mine, I would be okay."

"But you still didn't notice me," Ginny said, faltering. "So I decided to take matters into my own hands. There was Dean and the love potion..." She sighed inwardly. "I honestly thought I was doing the right thing. I couldn't understand why Hermione was so angry. I fell apart after she told you."

"Where does Neville fit into all this?" Harry asked.

"When you, Hermione, and Ron left, I didn't give up on you," Ginny admitted. "I seduced Neville as well, hoping that it would make you jealous when you came back."

"Did you use Amortentia on him as well?" Harry asked.

“See, this is what I’m talking about,” Ginny squealed, hiding her face in her hands. She nodded regretfully. “Yes, I did,” Ginny muttered, taking her hands away. “But only for a little bit. I was so obsessed with you that I forgot to keep the love potion going. It was weeks before I realized Neville was loving me on his own free will. That’s what got me, that someone would actually love me without the aid of a potion.”

“Can I tell you something?” Harry questioned. Ginny nodded. “You wouldn’t have needed a love potion for me. All you had to do was be yourself and I would have noticed.”

Ginny shook her head violently. “Harry, you don’t have to say that,” she said. “I was a horrible person back then. Please don’t feel you have to pretend to care or whatever you’re trying to do.”

“Do you think I’m pretending to care?” Harry asked.

Ginny studied his face for several seconds, looking into his eyes and contemplating. “Surprisingly, I don’t,” she admitted, offering a brilliant smile. “Does this mean you’re really not angry anymore with me?” she asked, and Harry smiled. She chuckled in disbelief. “That was easier than I imagined it would be.”

“Have you had your apology planned?” Harry asked.

“For years,” Ginny said. “It didn’t end like this though. For one, I figured I’d be groveling.”

“There’s still time,” Harry joked.

She raised one eyebrow in a questioning manner. When she realized he was joking, she smiled. “You know, this is the first real conversation I’ve ever had with you. I didn’t realize how easy it was to talk to you.”

“Maybe that’s because there are no butter dishes around to distract you,” Harry joked again.

Ginny opened her mouth and made a half-scoffing, half-laughing noise. Harry suddenly felt a playful jab in his shin and realized she

has nudged him hard with her foot. "Such cheek," she muttered, shaking her head. She reached for her drink, but realized it was empty.

"Here's what I don't get," Ginny said, ignoring the depleted liquid. "I don't see you or talk to you for twenty-one years, and I don't blame you for that, but you show up out of the blue wanting to talk to me. Then we have this conversation where I feel like- I don't know, like we've been friends for years. What is going on?"

Harry was expecting this question eventually. He was prepared. "My answer will depend on how you answer the following question," he said. He took a deep breath and exhaled. "Are you happy?"

Ginny straightened up. "Am I happy?" she repeated. "What kind of question is that?"

"Do you ever feel like something is missing?" Harry asked.

Ginny stared at him. "There you go again," she said in disbelief. "Truthfully, there are times when I think just that. I can't really explain it. It's like my life is a jigsaw puzzle, but there's a piece that I just can't find. It's not that it's lost, it's just... not there, you know? And sometimes I dream about, well, I dream about you."

"Do you still love me, Ginny?" Harry asked. It was out before he had a chance to stop it.

"I'm not even sure what love is, Harry," Ginny replied. "I'd be a fool to think that what I felt for you was love. I don't know even know what I'm feeling for you as you sit across from me. I'll tell you this much, I didn't even wear perfume today. I didn't want you to think I was back to my old tricks..." She was turning a bright shade of red again. "But to answer your question before..."

"I'm listening."

"Yes," Ginny said. "I'm happy. I have a loving husband, an amazing son, and a good life. I'm happy. I wouldn't trade that for anything."

Harry felt his insides go cold. There it was. She was happy. In a life where they were not in love, she was perfectly fine. Harry gulped and nodded. As he reached discreetly into his pocket and felt the picture, he considered telling her everything. Removing his hand, he fought the urge, and said, "Then, to answer *your* question before," Harry started. "I just wanted to mend old friendships."

"That's why you found me?" Ginny asked, looking as if she didn't really believe it.

"Yes," Harry said.

"Okay," Ginny said. "I believe you." She gazed at Harry for what felt like hours to him, studying his face and the validity of the conversation. She casually smiled, looked down at her watch, and then said, "I didn't realize what time it was."

"Do you have to go?" Harry asked with disappointment.

"I'm sorry," she said. "I'm off to Hogwarts to have lunch with Neville." She scooted out of the booth and extended her hand.

Harry stood up as well and stared at her extended hand. Although he would have much rather hugged her, he took it in his own and shook it.

"Listen, Harry, it was great talking to you," Ginny said. "Can we make sure this isn't the last time we do this?"

"Of course," Harry said.

"Well, you know how to find me," she said. She pointed to the table. "Don't forget to drink your butterbeer." She winked and then was off.

He watched her stride away. The years had been wonderful to her. She was just as beautiful as he remembered her to be, in each and every way. He could feel all the love he felt for her swelling up inside. He wanted to run and grab her, turn her around and kiss her passionately. He longed to do it. And he could tell she might allow him, if he tried hard enough.

“Butterbeer, my favorite.”

Harry spun around and found a familiar person sitting in the booth where Ginny has been sitting. Cronus was drinking what was left of his beverage of choice. Harry rolled his eyes.

Cronus wiped the liquid from his lips. “How did you know?” he asked.

“Lucky guess,” Harry muttered.

“Sit, sit,” Cronus said, gesturing to him. “We’ve much to discuss, don’t we?”

To-morrow, and to-morrow, and to-morrow,  
Creeps in this petty pace from day to day,  
To the last syllable of recorded time;  
And all our yesterdays have lighted fools  
The way to dusty death. Out, out, brief candle!  
Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player,  
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage,  
And then is heard no more. It is a tale  
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,  
Signifying nothing.

-William Shakespeare, *Macbeth*

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## Chapter Twenty-Two

### Cessation

Harry took the empty booth across from his future-self. The seat Ginny had occupied no less than two minutes ago was now taken up by this deteriorating version of himself. He hated the contrast. Cronus rattled the ice in the unfilled glass and then slammed it down upon the table. Several patrons turned in their seats, stared at the commotion, and then ignored them.

"What is this?" Cronus asked, tugging on Harry's cloak. "Imitation is the best form of flattery, or so they say."

Harry looked from his cloak to the one Cronus was wearing. Cronus's attire was a little worse for wear, similar to the picture that resided in Harry's pocket, with fringed edges and faded cloth, but it was certainly the same kind. Harry shuddered at the similarities.

Cronus coughed violently before continuing. "And you!" he croaked. "You've been gone for six days and I'm hurt, yes, yes, I am hurt that you're not excited to see me."

"Six days?" Harry repeated. "No, no, I already returned two months from now. You already sent me back a second time."

"A second time, did I?" Cronus wheezed. "Why, yes, that would make much more sense." He reached into his pocket and extracted a book. He placed it on the table. Harry read the upside down title: *History of Modern Magic*. "You see, I've been doing my homework. There are two strange witness accounts in this book on two particular nights."

"I bet I can guess," Harry said. "Two James Potters running around on Halloween...?"

Cronus cackled. "Precisely!" he croaked. "And a sighting of James Potter on the last day of your third year. Both have been attributed to Wormtail and Polyjuice potion, but we, yes, we know better."

Harry stared down at the book. Many questions ran through his head. "Cronus, why haven't people figured this out yet?"

"You mean Harry Potter time traveling?" Cronus asked gleefully. "Haven't you been paying attention? What you're doing is unheard of. No one is going to assume you're time traveling when people think it can't be done. The easiest, logical explanation is Polyjuice."

Harry nodded thoughtfully. "I suppose that makes sense, but wouldn't someone like Dumbledore be able to figure it out?"

Cronus grunted and grinned. "Who's to say he didn't?" he growled. "I've learned this about Dumbledore, something you should have learned a long time ago. He knows, doesn't he? And he just lets things happen."

"He knows a lot, but he can't know everything," Harry suggested.

"There will be a book written by Draco Malfoy," Cronus said, "that talks about this same thing."

"You believe Malfoy?" Harry questioned.

"Listen, will you?" Cronus snapped. "Think about it, Potter. In your second year, you could hear the basilisk because you spoke Parseltongue. Who else in the castle beside a Voldemort-possessed Ginny Weasley could understand snakes?"

Harry frowned, thinking back to the lessons he had with Dumbledore. In one particular memory, the Gaunts were speaking Parseltongue. Dumbledore *understood*. "You mean...?"

"If *you* were hearing the basilisk, *Dumbledore* could hear it," Cronus said. "I'm sure the old man knew about Ginny, and he just let it happen."

"He wouldn't," Harry replied.

"No?" Cronus questioned. "So sure, are you? You yourself thought Dumbledore manipulated the events of your First Year because you '*had the right*' to face Voldemort? And your third year, he gave *you* the job of freeing Buckbeak and Sirius. Not to mention that he *knew* he was going to die and thrust the fate of the Wizarding world on your shoulders. And you tell me that doesn't sound like the type of man who would allow an eleven-year-old to suffer for the greater good."

Harry gulped. He didn't like the way this conversation was going. Cronus always had a way of making him see things he wasn't and an even better way of manipulating his perceptions. That was exactly what he was doing now, and he was somewhat succeeding. He began to run all of Dumbledore's actions through his head. He finally concluded that the Headmaster *couldn't* have possibly known so many things, especially when it came to the Chamber of Secrets and Ginny. It was just... *sadistic*...

"Ah, no bother!" Cronus cried. "I'm sure you're wondering so much more, am I right?"

"Actually, yes," Harry admitted.

"For instance, why do I remember your actions when no one else does?" Cronus said, forebodingly. "That answer is the simplest."

He raised his hand slowly, allowing the sleeve to fall from his hand, revealing five words scarred into his skin. He gripped the edge of his hood, lowering and allowing the raven-colored hair to be freed. He stared at Harry with haunting emerald eyes. He parted the front portion of his hair to reveal the lightning-bolt shaped scar.



"I'm you."

Harry stared at the man for several seconds, blinking a few times in response. Then Harry frowned, looking strangely at him. "Um," Harry started. *"I know."*

It was Cronus's turn to just stare. "You know?" he questioned.

"Yeah, you told me the last time we met, two months from now," Harry replied lamely.

"Did I?" Cronus asked, frowning. "You mean I don't even have the pleasure of seeing your reaction? Damn myself! Damn ourselves, more like it, don't you think?" He sat back in the booth and scowled, grumbling to himself.

"If it's any consolation, I had no clue," Harry said softly, almost amusedly.

"Bah!" Cronus croaked.

"But I do have another question," Harry said. "If I'm your past, why can't you remember that?"

"Ah yes," Cronus mused. "Excellent question, excellent question indeed." He picked up the glass again and swirled some of the melted ice around in the cup before continuing. "Another question that goes hand in hand with this one." He rubbed his hands together, as if the disappointment of the previous revelation was already gone. "When time changed and you entered the new universe, do *you* remember the new past?"

Harry thought about it for a couple seconds. "No, you're right, but I attributed that to the fact that I took the memories out in the past. But come to think of it, I did start to remember things the more I lived in that world."

"And there's the key, isn't it?" Cronus asked, sipping the water that was inside the glass rather loudly. "It takes a little bit for your body and mind to adjust. It's not easy. You're not just sifting through one lifetime of memories."

“But for me, it took a little bit longer each time to know about the changes. The longest time yet has been two weeks. Mighty long time to be uninformed.” Cronus pressed his hand upon the history book. “That’s why I do research. I suspect any day now I will start remembering our interactions from your point of view.”

“When we met two months from now,” Harry started, “you still didn’t know how the timeline had changed in a personal way.”

Cronus made a noise in the back of his throat. “I said it’d be any day now, didn’t I?!” he shouted, once again drawing the attention of several other customers.

“Right, right,” Harry said, holding up his hands in defense.

Cronus pushed the book towards Harry. “You might need this more than me right now, wouldn’t you say?” he said. “I’ve already checked the marriage records.”

“Yeah, we’re married to Hermione,” Harry replied.

“I saw,” Cronus said. “Sent shivers up my spine, it did. Then there’s Ginny and Neville, strange combination, I’d say. Although not as strange as some others I’ve seen in my travels, but strange enough.” Cronus paused. “Why don’t you start by telling me where you’ve been and what you know. That will put us both on even playing fields, yes?”

Harry spent the next fifteen minutes updating Cronus, starting with the night at Godric’s Hollow. There was Ginny as a Horcrux and the end she had to meet. Harry explained the alternate universe where Dudley was a wizard and in charge of the Ministry followed by the plan to get back to Cronus. He retold the tale of the third year dementors and then what he learned about the timeline he was stuck in now.

“This should be easy to fix,” Cronus started. “Once I make more potion, we’ll send you back to Godric’s Hollow and-”

“Wait,” Harry interrupted. He hadn’t had much time to think, but he was certain he had reached perhaps the hardest decision he had

ever had to make. "Ginny's alive," he went on. "She's happy. What would happen if I... I don't know, didn't change anything...?"

"You can't possibly want to *stay* in this world," Cronus croaked.

Harry shook his head. "No, but Ginny's happiness means more to me than anything I could ever want. If *not* being with her is what is going to keep her alive, then I'm-" Harry faltered. He could feel his insides burning with emotion. "Then I'm willing to sacrifice-"

"Don't kid me!" Cronus hissed. "I saw you two sitting here. Are you telling me that you're going to sit idly by in this universe and not pursue Ginny?"

"If I have to, yes," Harry admitted. "Neville's my friend, I can't-"

"You *can't*?" Cronus seethed. "*You can't?*" Cronus was trembling beyond control. "After everything I've done for you, this is how you're repaying me? I'm giving you the opportunity of a lifetime and *you're going to take it again!*"

Harry recoiled. "Don't you see, Cronus?" Harry pleaded. "I've screwed up twice. The first time Ginny became a Horcrux and had to die. The second time she was Kissed by a dementor, which was a miracle that it was a *good* thing. Every time I go back, more people die. I'm never getting back to my own timeline."

"*Never?*" Cronus croaked. "There is no never. I hold the key to perfection. I can create a paradise."

"What paradise?" Harry countered. "You've failed. I've failed. The only way I can salvage this is if I put a stop to it right now. So what if I'm married to Hermione. It's not the end of the world."

"No, no, no!" Cronus growled. "It's you and Ginny!" Cronus picked up the glass and slammed it down upon the table with such force that it shattered. The sharp pieces cut deep into Cronus's hand and blood started seeping out from the wound. He ignored it. "You're making a mistake, Potter!"

There were tears in Harry's eyes. "The only mistake I made was listening to you the first time."

Cronus stood up violently, his hand a deep crimson now. He grabbed Harry's collar with his unbloodied hand and brought his face close to him. "I warned you, didn't I?" He shoved Harry backwards and with a sweep of his cloak, he was out the door.

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Harry took a long walk after his confrontation with Cronus, traveling all around, visiting Godric's Hollow, Hogwarts, and many other places that he loved. There were many thoughts crowding his mind and he needed to sort through them. A big decision such as the one he had devoted himself could not be made without proper attention.

Was he making the right decision?

If he thought with his heart, he knew it was the wrong decision. Ginny was his wife, he was her husband. As her husband, he was expected to do everything in his power to love her and keep her safe. There was no way for him to do that apart from her, married to someone else. He loved her, needed to be with her, and felt lost without her.

But because he loved, the logical parts of his brain were telling him that he was making the right decision. He had tried to change time, but had failed miserably, twice to be exact. If you counted Cronus's failed time travels, that boosted the tally up an undetermined large amount. Why would he assume the next attempt would be successful if others hadn't been? And if it didn't work, which was most likely, Harry refused to be placed back inside the destiny of becoming what his future-self had become.

Did he have a choice? Cronus had not changed yet. He was still wandering about. If Harry really had chosen to stop time traveling, shouldn't that have ended the Cronus-version of himself? Yet he was still around. Did that mean Harry would inevitably choose to keep going back in time?

It was the hardest decision he ever had to make. *Ginny is happy, Ginny is happy* kept pulsating in his head. There was no reason to

jeopardize her life again. She was happy. Harry refused to be the one to take that away from her.

It was close to 10:00 at night when Harry returned to his home. By this time, a soft drizzle had started as if small, wet fingers were prodding his skin. Harry looked into the sky. The clouds were grey, threatening to begin storming harder at any moment.

Harry approached his front door. There were no lights on inside the house. The building was silent. He came to the door, pulled his wand out, and opened it. He breathed in nervously and pushed the door, opening his senses to the desolate hallways he had left earlier this morning.

Hermione was home. Her coat was hanging on the coat rack. Harry slipped of his cloak and hung it beside hers, hearing the rain starting to come down harder as he did.

“Hermione?” Harry called out softly, his voice echoing off the corridors.

Harry placed one foot on the stairwell and one hand on the railing. Steadily he ascended the steps, one by one, one foot in front of the other, until he reached the top. The master bedroom was at the end of the hallway. Maybe a good fifteen normal steps from where he was standing. He started the trek down the corridor.

“Hermione, are you awake?”

When he arrived at the door, there was a soft murmuring from inside the room. Harry knocked lightly, but when there was no answer, he pushed it open. He held his breath.

Expecting the worst, he found nothing unusual. Hermione was lying in the bed, covered up and comfortable. The soft murmuring was the wireless. She must have fallen asleep listening to it. He exhaled.

The rain was falling a lot harder now, causing loud tapping on the window. Any moment now, Harry expected thunder and lightning. He braced himself and tiptoed over to the wireless, hopeful that he wouldn't disturb Hermione.

He reached for the knob on the wireless to turn it off, but paused to listen. He heard the familiar voice of Lee Jordan and was glad for some normality. He turned up the volume several decibels to listen.

“...don’t have any leads yet,” Lee said. “Anyone with information regarding the homicide is urged to contact the Ministry. Once again, our condolences go out to the Longbottom family for their loss. Don’t worry, Neville, we’ll get the monster that took you from us...”

Harry turned quickly from the wireless with insides numb. He looked towards the form in the bed and reached out cautiously to touch it. Was it possible?

“Hermione, wake up,” Harry said, his mouth dry. He nudged the form. He gripped the blanket and pulled the covers down.

Harry gasped. “No!”

Lying in the dark was Hermione, looking straight up at the ceiling without blinking, without moving, without breathing.

Hermione had been murdered.

No living man can send me to the shades  
Before my time; no man of woman born,  
Coward or brave, can shun his destiny.

-Homer, the Illiad

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## Chapter Twenty-Three

### One Year Later

Harry Potter trudged wearily up the stairwell of Grimmauld Place. It had been one of those days, the kind where he felt the seedy hands of guilt pressing down upon his existence. The anniversary of Hermione and Neville's death was approaching. It was less than a week away, but already Harry was hoping he'd be able to shrink away from public attention. He couldn't face the worried inquiries of concerned people. It would just tear him apart.

He barely even made it three steps before he stopped. On the wall beside him hung a picture of Hermione. He still didn't have the heart to take the photographs down. All of them still were placed around the house, including wedding and couple portraits. He didn't possess the ability to pack away the memories of his life, distorted as it was, inside boxes to be forgotten in the attic. He couldn't forget. This was his rule.

As he stared at Hermione's happy face, more guilt washed over him. It was potent, causing his knees to buckle beneath him. The tears were welling up in the corners of his eyes as he sat upon the stairs. He didn't want to be taken back to that night, that god-forsaken night, but sometimes he had no choice. Sometimes he had to allow himself to flash back...

*Harry held the lifeless body of his wife tightly in his arms. He trembled violently. His tears came out in a rage, flowing freely down upon his cheeks and soaking into Hermione's hair. His sobs were loud, his voice was hoarse. He held her tighter as the wireless continued to play in the background.*

*"Hermione, please," Harry begged, "wake up, wake up, wake up."*

*Harry looked down. Her eyes were still open, but the brown had lost all its life, and the vacant expression was no more than the last look she had on her face. Harry extended his fingertips and graciously closed her eyelids, almost expecting her to react to his touch. This was more for his sake than hers. He couldn't bear to look into those eyes and see the accusatory face of the dead woman.*

*"I'm so sorry," Harry whispered. "Hermione, I'm so sorry."*

*She was still warm. Whoever had been here might have only just slipped out minutes before Harry arrived. Did the monster approach the bedroom while Hermione was unaware? Had Hermione even felt any pain? Was it quick? If the murderer had just exited, maybe Harry could still catch the culprit. But he couldn't possibly leave her like this, not after he had failed her.*

*"Please, please, please," Harry repeated.*

*He stroked her hair in his hands, feeling the brown bushiness between his fingers. How many times had he done the same thing while she was still alive in this world? As more tears fell, he began to feel sudden, unexplained emotions. They were seeping their way into his consciousness. He now felt two very real, very conflicting emotions inside. He was crying for a friend, but he was also weeping for his wife. A strange, reluctant love laced the watery droplets sliding gently downwards to join the others.*

*"I love you, Hermione," Harry sobbed. "I'm so sorry."*

*Harry found his wand on the nightstand and lifted it. For a split second, he considered ending it right there. Taking his own life seemed to be the more feasible idea than to remain living. Instead, he attempted to conjure his Patronus because he needed to send the message to the authorities. They needed to know. They needed to capture the bastard that had done this.*

*Only faint wisps of light were discharged from his wand. No stag erupted, ready and willing to take his message to the Minister. No*



*stag appeared because it was a spell that required happiness, and his stock on that very emotion was on low supply.*

*"Harry?" called a voice from the hallway. "The door was open. I-"*

*Harry looked up to see the horrified face of Ginny.*

*"Harry!" Ginny cried. "What- what happened?"*

*"Send for help," Harry choked out.*

*Harry sobbed even more. He realized that Ginny must have done the same thing he had done tonight: take a long walk after lunch with Neville. Instead of returning home, she came to find him. Ginny had no idea that her own husband had met the same end as Hermione and now Harry would have to be the one to break the news to her.*

*"I'm so sorry," Harry said, repeating the phrase over and over again, to both the deaf ears of the dead and the unknowing ears of the living.*

*"I'm so sorry," Harry repeated under his breath.*

The memory was far too strong to relive anymore tonight. Harry pulled himself up from the step and shuddered. People had every right to be worried about him if they saw him in the state he was just in. He couldn't blame them really. He shook the flashback away and continued up the stairs.

After all these months, Harry rarely called Hermione's death by its proper title. He disliked labeling it murder because it confirmed that it was the intentional actions of a mad man- a mad man that was the future version of himself. More or less, it might as well have been Harry himself who picked up a wand and sent the killing curse to the unsuspecting Hermione.

Harry believed without doubt that Cronus was the one who had cast that spell. Harry stopped several steps up again, looking at another photo. It was his picture this time, standing next to Kingsley. Kingsley and he were shaking hands. It was the official picture of Harry as new Head of the Auror department. Harry shook his head, trying to stop the next memory from flowing, but was unable to...

*Harry was seated in his kitchen less than a week after the incident. The funeral had already taken place, the ceremonies were over. Hermione was buried. Harry felt like a train had hit him and dragged him hundreds of meters before dropping him off a cliff. The necessary arrangements were done. The healing would have to begin. James was staying with the Grangers until Harry felt he was capable of anything again.*

*Kingsley entered his kitchen. Harry had invited him back this evening after the Minister had expressed that he needed to discuss important matters with Harry. There were many things that were running through his head, all very plausible and all most likely going to be discussed.*

*"Can I get you anything?" Kingsley asked. "If you have tea, I can make you a cup."*

*"I'm fine," Harry replied.*

*Kingsley nodded. He pulled a seat out and took his place across from Harry. The man settled himself and then took a deep breath. "Harry," Kingsley started, "we have a lot to discuss."*

*"You don't want me heading up the case," Harry replied.*

*Kingsley sighed. "You're too emotionally involved," he replied. "It's going to cloud your judgment. I'm only telling you this for your own good."*

*"My own good?" Harry repeated. "What am I supposed to do then if I'm not on the case? I can't just sit around and dwell on it."*

*"You could try spending time with your family," Kingsley suggested. "Start the healing process."*

*"You're not going to give this case to Seamus, are you?" Harry asked.*

*"He's your second in command," Kingsley answered.*

*Harry rolled his eyes. "I grew up with Seamus. He's not ready for something like this."*

*"He's perfectly capable," Kingsley answered.*

*Harry breathed in heavily, trying to control his emotions. He didn't like it, but he had no choice. Kingsley held the only position that was above the Head Auror. Kingsley wouldn't budge on a decision like this. He knew the man well enough to know that. Harry reluctantly nodded, but Kingsley remained seated.*

*"There's something else, isn't there?" Harry questioned.*

*Kingsley shifted in his seat. "Just a couple questions about-"*

*"Honestly, Kingsley?" Harry interrupted. "You think I had something to do with Hermione's death? I thought you knew me better than that."*

*"This isn't personal," Kingsley replied. "Just routine, you know that." Harry made a sound of disbelief, and Kingsley continued. "Have you and Hermione been having problems?"*

*Harry shook his head. "No."*

*"You disappeared for a week," Kingsley said. "Then you meet with Ginny Longbottom. Next thing I know, your wife and her husband are out of the picture. Were you having an affair?"*

*"No!" Harry shouted.*

*"Tell me what you were doing then," Kingsley replied. "What's this about getting in a fight with Ron as well?"*

*"Let's hear it, Kingsley. Your theory is that Ron found out about me and Ginny and he was confronting me about it?" Harry questioned sarcastically. "That about sum it up for you?"*

*Kingsley shook his head. "I'm not trying to anger you, Harry," he said. "But you have to admit that your actions as of late have been out of character and strange. I need answers if you want me off your case." Harry simply stared at Kingsley. The Minister continued. "You're making this difficult for me. What are you hiding?"*

*"Give me Veritaserum. Check my wand," Harry said. "I did not kill my wife or Neville. If you want to know what I was doing talking to the Weasleys after all these years, I was trying to bridge some gaps that I regret making. Ron and I used to be best friends. Ginny was also a good friend. The Weasleys were always good to me. I wanted to make amends. Unfortunately, Ron didn't react so well. Ginny, on the other hand, was pleased to see me. We talked for a long time."*

*"That's all?" Kingsley questioned.*

*"Well..."*

*"The man," Kingsley went on. "Who was the man that you met after Ginny."*

*"I-" Harry said, trying desperately to think of the most truthful statement. "I think that's the man we need to be looking for."*

*Kingsley eyed Harry up suspiciously. "Who is he?"*

*"He told me his name was William Cronus," Harry replied. "He's not right in the head. Do you remember all those letters I used to get from admirers?"*

*Kingsley nodded. "They threatened your life because they thought you had married the wrong girl," he said.*

*"Cronus was obsessed with Ginny," Harry replied. "I didn't take him seriously, but I should have."*

*"Why didn't you say anything?" Kingsley asked.*

*"I was afraid of what he'd do if I set authorities on his trail," Harry said softly.*

*Kingsley frowned slightly. "Harry, I've known you for a long time and I trust you implicitly. If that's what you say happened, that's what happened. But I will tell you, if you did do this, now is the time to confess. After this moment, you will be punished to the fullest extent of the law."*

*Harry looked at Kingsley, straight in the eye. "I did not murder anyone."*

*Kingsley pounded his fist into the table. "That's what I want to hear," he said, smiling. "Now I want to know everything you know. Where can we find him? What does he do?" He pulled out a pad of paper and a quill. "Let's get the monster."*

Harry slammed his fist against the wall as the memory faded.

Twelve months later, there was absolutely no progress. Kingsley sent men down to the Department of Mysteries, but Cronus was gone. Since it was that particular Department, it was difficult to find the records of the workers. After some questionable investigation, not to mention the fact that it was Harry Potter, the name was found.

But that was it. William Cronus. A name. The man, the *monster*, had disappeared from the Ministry.

Their next stop was the apartment in Hogsmeade. Harry fully expected to find the same dust-filled room and his expectations were met. The Aurors charged into an empty flat, only to find the same lonely table that Harry had found before, the imprint of the picture still fresh in the grime.

But that was it. An empty apartment. An address. The man, the *monster*, had disappeared from the apartment, if he ever lived there to begin with.

Cronus was gone, slipped completely off the radar.

Harry swore and continued up the stairwell onto the second story.

Harry was sure the man had some kind of goal when he chose to do what he did. When he found Hermione, he was sure Cronus was going to show up seconds later and offer him another drink of the time liquid. Harry would have taken it without a second thought, anything to get away from the reality where his best friend was dead in his arms. Although he hated admitting it to himself, he was secretly hoping he'd find Cronus before the Aurors did and be able to travel back in time.

There was another goal that Harry guessed was Cronus's true intention. It was the goal that Harry tried desperately to fight, but ultimately couldn't. That was...

Harry heard a soft crying inside his room as he approached the door. He opened the door and looked inside. A beautiful redhead was sitting on the edge of the bed, crumpled-up tissues in her hands. She turned towards him, her brown eyes damp with tears, and smiled jadedly.

If Cronus wanted him to be with Ginny, he certainly got his wish. As Harry felt his heart give an extra beat for her, he was flooded with positive, healing emotions. He lost himself in her stare and soon lost himself in the memories.

*Harry honestly tried with everything inside him to stay away from Ginny. He felt if he pursued her, he'd only be reinforcing Cronus's demented existence, playing right into the twisted scheme of an insane man. Not to mention he would raise suspicion from Kingsley and other high officials in the Ministry.*

*No one could accuse him of not trying. What he could be accused of was not trying hard enough. He might have hinted that spending time together was not a smart idea, but he certainly didn't need his arm twisted to comply. What kind of man would he be if he denied Ginny comfort when she needed a listening ear? What kind of man would he be if he refused his arms when Ginny needed someone just to hold her? Besides, Harry too felt numb inside. The only time he actually felt real was around her.*

*It started out innocently enough. She sought out Harry for someone to talk to. Eventually they were meeting every weekend. It wasn't long before Ginny was seeing Harry every day of the week.*

*Before Kingsley could approach him again, Harry met with the Minister to explain the best he could. Harry said he knew it looked suspicious, but the friendship had been forged out of difficult times and mutual understandings. Kingsley smiled politely and asked if anything further than a friendship was developing. Harry answered honestly, saying that he was fighting hard to keep it as it was.*

*It was six months before anything more official developed. Harry vowed to keep the relationship as platonic as possible, but it was proving to be difficult. The attraction was evident. The sexual tension couldn't have even been cut with Sectumsempra. On more than one occasion, Harry found himself in a situation that he had to force himself to leave.*

*In November, Harry entered his kitchen after coming home from a long day's work at the Ministry. As he expected, Ginny was waiting for him (she did have a key, after all), but she wasn't happy. In fact, she looked downright furious.*

*She slammed Witch Weekly on the table with a loud thud. "I am not a scarlet woman!" she shouted.*

*Harry barely had time to hang his coat up. He frowned and replied, "I didn't know that was being disputed between us."*

*Ginny began pacing back and forth, muttering under her breath. While she was, Harry looked down at the magazine and read the headline: "Local Celebrities Betraying the Memory of Spouses." The byline read, who else but Rita Skeeter? Accompanying the headline was a big picture of Harry and Ginny in a tight embrace.*

*"That's not even real journalism," Harry replied, trying to make Ginny smile.*

*Ginny made an enraged noise. She summoned the magazine into her hands. "Think it's funny?" she growled. "Is THIS what you think of me?" She hastily opened the publication, ripping the glossy pages in the process, until she found the appropriate page. She read a passage from it, "Former Holyhead Harpies' star Chaser Ginny Longbottom was not only a speedy player on the Pitch, but when it comes to mourning her dead husband as well. Only months have passed since her spouse's untimely death and she's already thinking Neville Who?"*

*Harry listened, but was confused. "Ginny, why are you mad at me?"*

*She turned the page to a different page. "A friend of Harry, who wishes to remain anonymous, knows the reason why Harry is*

*keeping the redhead around. 'Isn't it obvious?' says Anonymous. 'Harry's a very lonely man. Ginny's always been infatuated with him. He needs someone willing to throw herself at him. I think you can do the rest of the math. Harry and I have spoken about this plenty of times.'"*

*Ginny stopped reading and threw the magazine at Harry. "Is that all I am to you?" questioned Ginny venomously.*

*"No!" exclaimed Harry.*

*"Is this my punishment for what I did to you all those years ago?" cried Ginny, tears of anger flowing from her eyes. "You string me along, pretend to be interested in me, all in the hope that I'll shag you?"*

*"Hold on," Harry said. "Pretend to be interested in you?"*

*Ginny scoffed and took a step towards him. "Oh don't deny it!" she hissed. "You must know how much I fight to not kiss you when I leave here at night." She took another step as she screamed the words. "You must know how much I cry afterwards, thinking it's much too soon to be falling for someone else. It's been going on for months." She was now standing right in front of Harry, eyes blazing. "You keep tempting me, Potter. What's your game?"*

*Ginny stared angrily into Harry's eyes. She was breathing violently and he could feel the warm bursts of breath upon his face. He sniffed, getting a whiff of her natural fragrance. "I-" Harry said, gulping, catching the gentle, pleading look in the brown pupils he was in love with. They were close, extremely close.*

*"Spit it out, Potter."*

*Harry reached up slowly and placed his thumbs against her cheeks to wipe away the tears. Ginny closed her eyes and reacted to his touch. He knew his fingertips could calm her.*

*"Don't," she whispered. "You-"*



*“Shut up,” Harry commanded, closing the gap and pressing his lips against her own. After several seconds, he pulled back. “People are going to talk,” he said.*

*“They’re already talking,” Ginny whispered, kissing him harder and more frantically than Harry had ever kissed a woman.*

A small smile crept upon his face. Ginny cocked her head to the side in a questioning manner. “What are you smiling about?” Ginny asked.

“I was just thinking about the night we first made love,” Harry answered.

Ginny reached out her hand and Harry came closer, taking her hand in his own. “You know you don’t need to think about it,” she answered. “You can relive it tonight.”

“I was counting on it,” he replied. Harry grinned again. He repositioned himself on his knees behind her. He began to rub her shoulders.

Ginny made a noise of approval. “That’s right,” she said. “Not even the great Harry Potter can get something like that for free.”

“You’ve trained me well,” Harry said, working hard to get a knot out of her left shoulder.

“I think tonight went fairly well, don’t you?” she asked.

Harry nodded. “I would say so,” he said. It was the twenty-first anniversary of the Hogwarts Victory. Although it wasn’t as big a celebration as the original one in Harry’s world, seeing that it still took another two years to defeat Voldemort, the Wizarding World still celebrated it as the beginning of the end of the Dark Lord’s reign. The surviving Weasley family had come over to Grimmauld Place to celebrate. After the party, everyone went home and the children went back to school.

Harry chuckled somewhat. “At least better than Christmas,” Harry answered. “Ron didn’t hit me this time, so that’s always good.”

"He's slowly coming around," Ginny said. "What were you and him talking about?"

"Hermione," Harry replied. "I explained-"

"Ow, not so hard," Ginny said, wincing.

Harry apologized to her and rubbed her shoulder blades a bit more softly. "Better?"

"Mhmmm," she moaned. "Go on."

"I explained to Ron a lot of things," Harry said. "I showed him a couple passages from Hermione's diary. I think he's starting to understand. How long do you think before we're back to old times?"

"You mean really old times?" Ginny questioned. "I'm not sure. Don't push it, Harry, please. Just let it happen in Ron's time."

She was right. She usually was. "That's hard for me," Harry admitted, moving his hands across her lower back. "I miss talking to him. I miss that old Ron, the one I knew back in Hogwarts."

"That was a long time ago," Ginny said. "You know how my dad's death affected all of us. I'm just lucky I managed to turn my life around before it was too late. I could have self-destructed, you know. I was that far gone."

"I'm sorry I didn't help," Harry replied.

"Don't be," Ginny said. "You're here now. I might have waited twenty-eight years for you to finally notice me, but you're here now. It was worth the wait. Even *if* Ron doesn't completely agree."

"I'm just happy the rest of your family has accepted me," Harry said.

"Mum was always rooting for you and me," Ginny said. "I never did tell her what happened back then. Well, she *did* hear I kissed you in front of the Common Room after our big win."

"But you didn't tell her the part where I threw you off of me?" Harry asked.

Ginny groaned. "Let's never talk about that part again," she said. "Let's just leave Mum keep on believing that it was a good thing."

Harry laughed. "Deal," he said. "But what about little Roxanne? She might find it interesting."

"Harry, don't encourage her," Ginny said with amusement in her voice.

"You don't think you can handle competition from a ten-year-old?" Harry teased. Ginny reached backwards and slapped his thigh. Harry went on. "You should have seen her tonight when I gave her a hug goodbye. Red as a tomato. Reminded me of someone else at that age." Harry playfully reached down and gave Ginny's bum a squeeze.

"Hey!" Ginny responded. "That's for later," she said. "Right now, you're not done pampering me."

Harry grinned and continued massaging Ginny's back. She was silent now as the steady hands of her lover pinched her back lightly, lovingly grasping her delicate skin. She moaned slightly as the ticking of the clock became the only sound of the room.

The Weasley family was certainly a completely different clan now. Despite only one brother dying in the old timeline, there weren't as many children compared to this particular timeline. Fred and George had ten between them, Percy was working on his sixth, and even Charlie was married in this timeline with three children.

It was a morbid sort of way to compensate for the others' deaths.

"You still back there?" Ginny asked.

Harry realized he had stopped rubbing and stopped responding. "Yeah," he answered. "Just thinking."

"What about?" Ginny questioned.

"My life a year ago," Harry answered. "It feels so far away, yet still so close. Does that make sense?"

Ginny nodded. "I was thinking about the same thing before you came up here," she said, lifting up her tissue to show Harry. "I deplore crying. It always happens around this time of year though. Even more now that it's been a year since Neville..." She crumpled up the tissue and tossed it on the nightstand. "Do you ever feel guilty?" she asked.

"Every day," Harry answered.

"Me, too," Ginny replied, turning herself around to face Harry. "But I also feel like this is how my life is supposed to be, as horrible as that sounds. I love Neville very much, but I never felt complete with him. You make me feel that way."

Harry admired her brown eyes, which were glistening a little bit. "I love you, Ginny."

"Why are you so good to me?" Ginny asked. She raised her hand and touched Harry's cheek. "Merlin knows I don't deserve it."

Harry smiled and leaned in towards the redhead. His lips swept over her own for several seconds before leaving them. "Because you're perfect," Harry answered. "Why do you love me?"

Ginny's eyes sparkled. "Because you're good," she answered. "When I was young, I didn't love you because you were *the* Harry Potter..." she chuckled. "Okay, I did at first, but when I got over that, it was because you always tried to do the right thing. You're a good person, on the inside and the outside. I can't imagine you being any other way."

Harry's mind went to Cronus and he immediately tried to find Ginny's words in his future-self. He couldn't apply that to him. Cronus was not good. Would Harry end up that way? He didn't know, but he hadn't seen the crazed man in over about a year. Harry was sure he was gone for ever. Harry had often considered telling Ginny about Cronus's real identity and the story of his time travel, but he didn't think she'd believe him. He wasn't even sure if *he* believed it anymore.

“Not to mention you have a bloody nice arse,” Ginny interrupted.

She wagged her eyebrows at him and smiled mischievously. Slowly, she leaned towards him, kissing his lips. She pressed her hands firmly against his chest, tilting him towards the bed. As she continued to pursue his mouth with passion, she swung her leg over his body and straddled him. She began to lightly kiss his neck.

Harry breathed in her scent as her hair covered his face. As she nibbled seductively, he moaned, and whispered into her ear without any previous thought. “Marry me.”

Ginny lifted her torso away from him and positioned herself looking down at him. She frowned for a split second, then her smile widened. She bit her lower lip, followed by the most animalistic, desirable glint in her eyes. She crossed her arms, gripped the bottom of her shirt, and pulled the piece of clothing over her head.

Later, as a more-than-satisfied Harry fell asleep, he guessed by the performance Ginny had just skillfully executed, her answer to his question was yes.

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“Harry, get the door,” Ginny muttered in the late hours of the night.

Harry stirred, hearing Ginny’s voice. “Get the what?” he asked groggily.

**BANG BANG BANG**

Harry heard it that time. Someone was at the front door, pounding away. Harry didn’t feel like getting out of bed and answering the door. He wanted to fall back asleep and spend the rest of the night beneath the covers with his new fiancé. Harry sat up in bed and listened, hoping the knocker would leave.

**BANG BANG BANG**

Harry swore and pushed the covers away from himself. He fumbled around in the darkness for his clothing. Where were they? Ginny

hadn't exactly been graceful when she ripped his clothing off only hours prior. She threw them in every direction. Instead of searching for them, he opened his closet and grabbed the first thing he could.

**BANG BANG BANG BANG**

It was the black cloak. Harry didn't think about it anymore as he slipped it over his body. He located his wand quickly and lit it. He finally found his glasses and exited the room to intercept the person at the front door.

Harry lifted his glasses and rubbed his eyes, trying to wipe the sleep away. He descended the stairwell, avoiding a broom that Roxanne had left on the stairs earlier. As he approached the door, he yawned, only to have that drowned out by the pounding again.

"Hold on," Harry muttered.

He wrapped his hand around the doorknob, wondering who would be here at- he checked his watch- 2:30 in the morning. He turned the knob and pulled, not expecting what was behind the door.

"Cronus?" Harry asked in disbelief.

This man had not been seen for about a year. He literally disappeared off the radar. This was the same man who was wanted for two murders, a man authorities almost believed didn't exist. And now he just strolled up to Harry's front door. Harry should have been furious with this man, but he was rather curious instead. Why was he here after all this time?

"Harry Potter, Harry Potter," Cronus said, his eyes glittering. He placed a hand on Harry's shoulder and shoved Harry backwards. He hobbled into the house, repeating Harry's name again. "I've got a problem."

Harry shut the door behind him and followed Cronus into the sitting room. Whatever happened, Cronus was not going upstairs. "You're telling me," Harry said. "You're a wanted man. You do know I'm going to have to take you in."

Cronus flopped himself into a chair. His cheeks were reflecting the little bit of light shining in from the window. If Harry had to guess, Cronus had been weeping. Was this regret, Harry wondered, for what he had done? Had he finally had enough of the torturous life he led?

"I was furious," Cronus croaked, his wrinkly hand rubbing his temples. "I was furious with you for accepting this universe. It was supposed to be you and Ginny."

Harry pulled a seat closer to his future-self. "Listen, if you officially confess, your punishment won't be as severe."

"It was supposed to be *me* and Ginny," Cronus continued. "We promised each other, did you know that? No more leaving her behind. No more secrets."

Harry leaned back in his chair. "I remember that conversation," he replied. "We promised each other that we'd grow old together." Harry looked away, towards the hallway, praying Ginny would remain upstairs. "Listen, Cronus, do you really think Ginny would want you to become a murderer?"

Cronus slowly reached his pocket and extracted his wand. He placed the familiar holly and phoenix feather combination on his lap. "Ginny would have wanted us together," he answered.

Harry shook his head. "She loves us because we're good," Harry pleaded. "What do you think she'd say if she knew what you've become?"

"I had no choice," Cronus replied. "No choice. No choice."

"You always have choices," Harry replied. "Look, Cronus, you have to come with me to the Ministry."

Cronus's fingers tightened around the wand.

Harry himself tensed. "If you fight or run," Harry said, "I promise I won't hold back. That's my warning. Don't make this harder on yourself. Put your wand down and let's do this civilly. That's how Ginny would have wanted you to do it."

Cronus wheezed as he breathed, his chest rising and falling. "I was convinced," he continued, as if the first half of the conversation hadn't happened, "that all I need was more time to remember. I should have known after I met with you the first time. I had no memory from your point of view. I should have known then."

"Cronus, we can talk about all of this when we get to the Ministry," Harry said.

"I was convinced I just needed time," Cronus repeated. "But the months went by, and I still didn't remember." He passed his wand from hand to hand and back again, and repeated the process, eyes transfixed on the moving wood. "What choice did I have? I was sure that everything would go back to normal and I'd be gone, absorbed into time as if I never existed. I was wrong. I was very wrong."

Harry heard the bed creak upstairs and listened for footsteps. He breathed a sigh of relief when he heard none.

"That's when I realized something, Harry Potter," Cronus said, staring now at Harry. "The reason why I'm stuck in the past, the reason why I can't remember your memories, the reason why I'm still here." He cackled pitifully. "I'm no longer you."

Harry frowned. "What do you mean? We're not the same person anymore?"

"Haven't you been listening?" Cronus shouted. "I've broken off from your timeline! Do you know what that means? DO YOU?" He grabbed Harry by the collar, leaving Harry sputtering for an answer. "I'll tell you!" he screamed, shoving Harry back. "It means everything I've done was for nothing. It doesn't matter what changes, I'll still remain the same."

"Listen to yourself," Harry said. "Let's get you help. If what you say is true—"

"And that also means Ginny will never be mine," Cronus croaked. "She'll never know what I've done for her. And I'll never touch her again. I'll never kiss her again. I'll never be with her again."



Harry didn't like where this conversation was headed. He slowly reached into his pocket and wrapped his fingers around his wand.

"You know, I've been watching you and Ginny for months," Cronus said. "I seem to have done you a favor. You should be thanking me, yes, you should. Instead you're reaching for your wand."

"You killed Hermione and Neville," Harry hissed. "I will never thank you for that."

"I only did what you were too weak to do!" Cronus croaked.

"You know who you sound like, don't you?" Harry questioned.

"Do not compare me with Voldemort!" Cronus yelled. "He killed for power. I killed for love." He started coughing violently before continuing. "Not that I'm over going to reap the benefits of my actions. You're the one who remains happy and you're not even thankful."

Harry placed his wand upon his lap as well, just to make sure the playing field was even.

"I have another secret," Cronus whispered. "I haven't been completely honest with you. I've only told you half of the story. Yes, yes, only half."

"What's the rest of it then?" Harry asked.

"I had help with the Time Potion," Cronus answered. "A man from the Department of Mysteries. He directed me where to find it. He assisted me in creating it. He guided me in using it. It was all his idea to begin with. I was desperate, don't you see? His words were like healing ointment. He promised me my wife back. What choice did I really have?"

"Who was this man?" Harry asked.

"He called himself Cronus," he replied. "He also had a secret. And I've been through it over and over in my head. I finally understand what happened that night my family was murdered. No other outcome makes sense. And what's more, it will keep happening. That's destiny,

a perpetual loop. What I'm trying to tell you is that I've accepted my place in this destiny. Believe me, Harry Potter, I wish I had a choice."

Harry gulped. "Who murdered your family?"

Cronus cackled loudly. "Don't you see?" he crooned. "It was us."

In speed he had not yet displayed, Cronus had cast a spell. Harry fell to the floor in a body-bind hex. Before Cronus stunned Harry into unconsciousness, he bent closer to Harry's ear and whispered eight chilling words.

"If I can't have Ginny, no one can."

*The world is round and the place which may seem like the end may also be the beginning.*

*-Ivy Baker Priest*

*Baby, I've been here before.  
I know this room, I've walked this floor.  
I used to live alone before I knew you.  
Yeah I've seen your flag on the marble arch,  
But listen, love is not some kind of victory march,  
No it's a cold and it's a very broken Hallelujah.*

*-Leonard Cohen, Hallelujah*

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## **Chapter Twenty-Four**

### **Paradox**

A hand reached out in the darkness for a brass doorknob. The aged fingers creaked as each individual digit wrapped around the knob tightly. It was cool upon the wrinkled palm, so much that a chill shot up unexpectedly through the arm and caused the body to shudder.

The owner of the hand was not stymied by the charge. There was very little left in this world that could properly stimulate his senses, and the familiarity of the scene was not on the list. He tightened his grip, turned the knob properly, and pushed the door open. The door moaned as he expected, but no one else was conscious in the house to even care.

The door was fully open and the man stood still in the door frame. Moonlight shone steadily through the window and fell upon the man's face. He flinched, as if the light itself burned his skin. Perhaps in a way, it did. After all, his kind of people enjoyed the darkness and performed their deeds in the shadows, away from the judgmental eyes of the self-righteous.

He moved a step to the left and the night enveloped him once more. He reveled here, in the secrets, in the silence. The darkness was his mistress now more than anyone else and he was meeting her in a clandestine tryst. He might as well just accept this because after this evening, she would be his only company. Darkness. Shadows. His salvation.

The bed was several feet before him, also hidden in the blackness. Since his eyes were adjusted to the lack of light, he could easily make out the small form already beneath the covers. Red locks of hair peaked out near the pillows. If he listened closely, he'd be able to hear the delicate creature breathing softly.

A sick grin spread across his face as he reached deep inside his black cloak. His worn fingers wrapped around his wand, making sure the tool was still intact, ready to be used. It warmed as his skin came in contact with the piece of holly, seemingly knowing that its master needed it for another important task. He pulled the sword from its sheath, admiring the weapon.

It had already proved its worth a year ago when Hermione and Neville had gotten in the way of his happiness. The decision to take action would have been difficult many years ago, he might have even felt regret, but it was much too simple. Neville was the easier of the two because he dared to touch Ginny. How foolish was his Gryffindor friend to think he deserved such a woman? He found him at Hogwarts late in the greenhouses. How effortless was it to approach the unknowing Herbology professor in the middle of the night?

He would have preferred Hermione's life to be spared, but she would have only caused problems with his vision of a happier place. He had entered the room just as he was doing now and willingly took her life away from her. His eyes burned with intensity, almost as if he was oblivious to his transgressions, but that was incorrect. He was fully aware of his actions, and although he didn't fully approve of ending Hermione's life, he felt enough satisfaction in what he was doing to not hate what he had become.

He was convinced that he was doing what was necessary, what was morally right, in order to bring peace to his life. He watched for months, knowing that his younger-self was benefiting from his accomplishments. Harry was happy and surely he was grateful for what happened, no matter the cost. The months went by and nothing had changed for the man. His life had not improved. His own personal hell was still burning hot.

The man breathed the darkness that surrounded him in and took a step towards the redheaded witch's side of the bed. Another surge of familiarity sent a shudder through his extremities again. A sense of déjà vu invigorated and tingled his body. As he closed the final steps between him and the bed, he grinned callously.

Had the man who guided him walk this same path towards an unsuspecting Ginny Weasley? How many more predecessors ended up in this same place, this exact same position, this exact same state of mind? He didn't know, but he was sure of one thing: the murderer of his family was Harry Potter. He finally understood it. It finally clicked into place.

It wasn't a choice. He was merely one man in a perpetual chain of events that kept repeating in similar, yet different kinds of ways. He was replacing his guide, and after tonight, Harry Potter would replace himself as the new Cronus. No, it wasn't a choice. It was destiny.

It was the right thing to do.

The man reached out the aged hand again and gripped the top of the cover. He slowly pulled it down, watching the concealment melting away, revealing the woman's long, slender neck, her bare shoulders, and her naked back. He grunted, admiring her creamy skin in the moonlight.

"You were always beautiful when you slept," the man whispered into the night, delicately brushing his fingertips against her shoulder. "It's been so long since I've watched. I had almost forgotten."

Ginny murmured something and moved. She sighed but did not wake.

"You used to have nightmares all the time," the man went on. "Do you remember, Ginny? You would wake up scared out of your mind, and I would hold you." He cackled softly. "Other nights, you would watch the kids because you said it helped soothe your nerves, remember? You said they were innocent and you wanted them to remain that way as long as possible."

“Some nights,” the man continued, “I was already awake watching you for the same reason. Just the sight of your peaceful face would end my own nightmares.”

His hand moved to her hair, stroking it gently. “You can’t save me from this nightmare, can you?” he croaked. “No, you can’t.” He bent closer, kissing her shoulder gently. “But I know you’ll understand. I know you’d do the same if you were in my position.”

The man wrapped his fingers tighter around his wand, bringing it to eye level. “This is the only way, isn’t it?” he whispered, slowly extending the holly and phoenix feather wand towards the slumbering woman.

He paused. The woman was stirring. As she yawned, she turned over in the bed, blinking several times as she looked at him with her perfect brown eyes. As she stared in horror and confusion, the man backed up several inches, subjecting himself to the moonlight.

“Who are-?” Ginny started, frowning, but staring at him in a familiar gaze. She locked eyes with him, finding a pair of emerald gems watching her. “Harry?”

The man froze, feeling the name pierce his ears and reach into the soul he didn’t know still existed. No one had called him such a title for years, not even he used this name anymore. For a moment, a very brief amount of time, his humanity was aroused, but then, just as fast as it had appeared, it was gone. Tonight was not about redemption, no, tonight was about embracing the appetite for destruction.

“No,” the man said, shaking his head. He stepped closer and was swallowed up by the darkness. “My name is William Emmett Cronus.”

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When Harry regained consciousness, he was in the exact same position he was in when he fell. The rough fabric of the carpet pressed against his face. His limbs were tingling as his heart tried to replenish his arms and legs with fresh blood. His head burned with pain in the spot Cronus had pressed the wand and stunned him. He

reached up to ease the pain and felt the zigzagging scar upon his forehead. It reminded him too much of battles fought long ago.

Cronus had not bothered to bind him nor harm him any further. His goals were not to stay upon the bottom floor, but to ascend the stairwell and take the thing that meant most to Harry. And that, Harry swore, was going to be the intruder's biggest mistake.

Harry sat up and looked around. Silence gripped the house. He expected many things when he awoke, but a total lack of sound was not one of them. A sinister feeling rose up inside him. The house emulated the macabre mood of a tomb.

At that thought, Cronus's departing words flashed into the forefront of his mind. Ginny's physical condition was all that mattered right now. The fear for her well-being gripped him. He couldn't lose her, not again, not after finally finding his way back to her. But it was silent in Grimmauld Place, and that terrified him.

He began to desperately search his surroundings, looking for his wand. The smart thing for Cronus to do would have been to take his wand, but he couldn't predict the insane man's behavior. "Wand, wand, wand," Harry muttered. "*Lumos!*" To his right, his wand ignited and he lunged for it.

With weapon in hand, Harry stood up and wiped the sweat from his brow. It was time to discover what happened in this house while he was blacked out. If Ginny was dead, he was sure he couldn't be held responsible for his actions.

"CRONUS!" Harry bellowed. "SHOW YOURSELF!"

Nothing but silence greeted him. Was Cronus already gone? Had he already accomplished his evil deed and had run for it, only to allow Harry to discover the scene for himself?

Harry tore out of the sitting room, turning over a chair and knocking over a vase in the process. The object shattered against the ground and the pieces scattered onto the floor. Harry stepped through the breakage, crunching the porcelain beneath his feet. "CRONUS!"



Harry shouted again, not caring about any damage to his worldly possessions.

*“Harry Potter.”*

Harry came to a stop in the dining room. He could have sworn he heard whispering. He paused to listen, straining his ears to hear better. With baited breath, he waited.

*“Harry Potter.”*

He swung around quickly, noticing a form that was standing directly behind him. In Auror-like reflexes, he threw a stunning spell towards the form. Instead of the man falling, he shattered. It was then that Harry realized it was a mirror and he was shooting at his own reflection. The cracked image of himself stared back at him.

More whispers, all around him, yet no one could be seen. *“Be quiet, why don’t you, Harry Potter?”* he said. *“You’re loud enough to wake the dead.”*

Cronus barely finished the last word before cackling uncontrollably.

“SHOW YOURSELF!”

Harry clenched his jaw and his hand tightened around his wand. His temper was rising fast as the volume of the cackling increased as well. The beating of his heart pounded away in his chest. He stepped quickly away from the shattered mirror and into the hallway. Shadows enveloped him, but he noticed the distinct shape of a human being standing at the end of the hallway.

*“Expelliarmus!”* Harry shouted at the exact moment Cronus did the same.

The opposing red jets of light sliced through the air of the hallway, lighting up the walls and the floor in a crimson tint. They met in mid-air. As if absorbing into each other, they vanished. No ricochet, just a complete disappearance.

Harry stared curiously at the spot in which their spells had disintegrated. He thought he noticed something floating there. He glanced up at Cronus, who also looked perplexed at the small black speck.

Harry felt his hair begin to rustle and guessed a breeze was blowing from behind. Despite his moving follicles, he failed to actually feel the coolness of the wind. At the same moment, Cronus' straggly hair was moving as well, pointing in Harry's direction. Cronus wheezed as his eyes darted around him.

He heard a sound upon the floor and looked down. The tiny shards of glass that belonged to the mirror he had broken were dragging slowly towards Cronus. Another sound caught his attention, this time on the wall. He looked just in time to see a picture of Ginny and himself fall to the floor and smash.

"What the bloody hell?" Cronus cried.

Harry held up his wand and stared at it, realizing the reason for what has happening. "Same wand," Harry said, looking towards Cronus's wand. As he did, he noticed the black speck again, but it was larger, about the size of his fist. The specks of glass paused beneath it momentarily, then proceeded to levitate towards it.

Harry approached the spot to investigate at a closer proximity. He frowned, realizing that it wasn't really a black color. It was almost as if there was an absence of color. Harry could see through it, but not to the other side. It looked as if there was a hole in the air. And it was slowly growing.

Several more pictures on the wall rattled and then fell from their hanging. As it lay in shattered glass, the small shards began to slide towards the strange feature. Following the glass, the heavier wooden frames and pictures within began to move.

"Bah!" Cronus shouted. "Enough!" He cackled loudly as he raised his wand. "*Avada Kadavra!*" The green jet of light exploded from his wand towards Harry. The spell was on a steady course, but it literally curved in mid-flight and was absorbed by the hole in the air.

Harry, who had been holding his breath, was relieved. "What do you say, Cronus, shall we finish this the Muggle way?" he suggested, as he could feel his clothing being ever so lightly tugged.

Cronus didn't respond. Out of his cloak flew a flask. Cronus screamed and scrambled to catch it, but the newborn power of the hole was growing stronger. His fingers gripped the lid before it popped off. Liquid burst from the container, flowing through the air like a miniature river. Harry recognized the Time Potion right away as it cascaded towards the hole, which was twice as large now.

Closer and closer the liquid came to the hole. As it streamed into the anomaly, all hell broke loose.

It was a loud explosion. Harry was knocked directly off his feet onto the floor. His backside burned with pain as he lay on the floor. He didn't have time to regain his composure as several objects smacked him in the head. He quickly shielded himself, and looked towards the hole, which had once again increased in size.

Harry attempted desperately to crawl away, but the attraction was growing as well as the size. Floorboards were shaking beneath him as he attempted to exit. A chair skidded past him, narrowly missing him, and was absorbed into the hole.

"What is going on, huh?" Cronus screamed. His voice was distorted, as if the anomaly was ripping sound from the air as well.

Harry managed to look back at Cronus. The man was having the same problem. Harry was about to respond, but at that moment, he lost all grip and he was pulled faster towards the hole. Watching Cronus, he finally lost all grip and was also plummeting towards it. Both men slipped into the growing hole.

Harry felt his body contort, stretch, and distort. Then black. Then color. Then nothing. And then everything.

When his finger was the last piece of his body to go through, the hole expanded, then collapsed in upon itself.

*Anything that happens once does not necessarily happen again, everything that happens twice is likely to happen a third time as well.*

*-Arab proverb*

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## **Chapter Twenty-Five**

### **The Many-Headed Snake**

Time and space passed by in a flash.

Still scenes and faces, active people and places were all around him. They were slowing down, speeding up, faster, faster, and then paused. Harry felt as if he were suspended outside the still image as it flickered all around him.

The Hogwarts castle appeared in his vision, but it wasn't a singular place. Multiple structures swirled in and out of his eyesight, overlapping each other. The castle was bathed in moonlight and large amounts of activity were taking place. Harry strained to listen and thought he could make out faint shouting. If he had to guess, the Battle of Hogwarts was taking place.

All of a sudden, the multiple, overlapping images were gone. Harry collapsed violently. As soon as he gathered his footing, he glanced around the familiar walls of the castle. He was in the hallway near a secret passage. He frowned, trying to hear properly, because there was a lot of noise, and it was coming in and out of distortion.

"They've broken in already!"

Harry turned quickly to face the proclamation. A group of Hogwarts students were facing away from him. He recognized the back of Lee and Hannah's heads, also the red locks of two Weasleys. As Harry observed more, he had to surmise that this particular group of people were the fighters sent to protect the secret passage, except no one had broken in yet.

That's when he noticed through the crowd where they were looking. Through the heads and shoulders, Harry saw the familiar black cloak of Cronus. He was standing there, grinning manically, with his wand pointed directly into Fleur's temple and one arm around her neck. Bill was the closest, standing maybe ten feet from them.

"Let her go!" Bill shouted.

"Manners, William, manners," Cronus croaked, cackling. He moved the wand slowly from her temple to her neck, biting his lip in anticipation. "Or I'll be forced to hurt the Missus."

"Beell, don't worry about me," Fleur said, flinching as Cronus pressed the wand further into her neck.

"What do you want?" Bill questioned.

"I need to know where your darling little sister is," Cronus said, smiling. "I have something to settle."

Harry gritted his teeth and raised his wand, trying to aim. He couldn't mark the target, but he didn't need to. Bill charged, but at that moment, Cronus raised his wand and struck Bill down with a hellish green light.

Pandemonium followed. The castle began to flicker, although Harry was sure no one else was aware of the odd sight. The entrance to the secret passage way exploded. Dust and smoke clouded the hallway. Harry tried in vain to keep Cronus in his view, but all he saw through the crowd was a blond-haired woman sprawled out on the ground, lying beside her husband.

"Cronus!" Harry screamed.

The Death Eaters were rushing out of the passageway. Their masks and hoods were terrifying in the distorted vision. Harry backed up against the wall as members of the DA rushed by him. He scanned the crowd again, searching for his future counterpart.

A spell nearly took his head off. He looked up and saw a chunk that had been taken out of the wall. He returned his sight towards the

insanity and saw Fred Weasley standing there with a wand pointed directly at him, a smirk on his face.

“Surrender?” the twin asked.

“What?” Harry questioned.

“Didn’t think so,” Fred replied. “*Reducto!*”

Harry quickly dodged the spell and rolled out of the way as several more spells were cast in his direction. He put up a shield as soon as he could and stood up to face Fred.

“I don’t want to fight you!” Harry shouted.

“You picked the wrong side then, didn’t you?” Fred said.

Harry heard a cackle. With the protection of the shield, which wouldn’t hold up forever, Harry glanced to his left. Cronus was standing there, watching the scene, and started to raise his wand in Fred’s direction. Fred wasn’t paying attention to him.

“*Avada-*”

“NO!”

Harry broke the shield and shouted his own spell, trying to miraculously deflect the killing curse yet again. This time, it seemed as if the spells were magnetized towards each other. The red and the green curved in mid-air and met each other. The reaction was stronger than before.

Everyone was pushed away in a loud explosion. Harry quickly got to his feet and watched the rip in existence growing. He looked around and saw Fred, who seemed to be fine as he moaned on the floor. Everyone else was simply staring at the anomaly.

Cronus stood up, his back facing the growing hole. He coughed violently. Harry didn’t even think, he simply charged straight at the man, somehow knowing that he and Cronus had to enter the rip in

order for it to close. Harry slammed into Cronus and tackled him into the rip in time.

The trip this time was instantaneous. Harry landed on top of Cronus. He quickly rolled off and felt the cool feeling of grass on his hands. He looked around. It was nighttime and the battle sounded as if it were no longer happening. They were outside the castle now, somewhere on the grounds.

Cronus too stood up. He hobbled left and then right. His whole body seemed to be reacting negatively to the time and space traveling. He buckled over and sat with his head in his hands against a stump, moaning.

Harry didn't feel all that great either. He wondered how long it would be for him? How many more trips through time would it take to start affecting him more on a mental level? Had it already started?

"Hey, guys, get inside, we're fighting!"

Harry glanced up. A young man had exited a castle door and noticed them. He sounded distraught and Harry guessed that the battle had not begun yet. The man looked rather young from the light of the wand, maybe had just turned seventeen, his long brown hair covering his shoulders in a bluish light.

Harry suddenly recognized him. Could it be the same person from the prison cells in the first timeline that he had changed? "Evan?" Harry called out. "Evan Tebron?"

The man pushed some hair out of his eyes and exited the door. "Yes, Sir, that's me," he said. "I'm letting everyone know that we're gathering in the Great Hall to discuss our plans of defense. You-Know-Who is on his way."

"Right," Harry said. "Evan, you watch yourself tonight. It's going to be dangerous."

"I know," Evan replied. "I know what could happen."

*"Anything!"*

Harry was pushed out of the way. Cronus charged past him and fired off a spell Harry couldn't identify. It knocked Evan off his feet and the student simply laid there unconscious.

Harry watched the darkness literally tremble. The castle began to flicker. He stood up, watching multiple Hogwarts overlap each other. He looked at Cronus, who was mesmerized by the same thing.

Harry approached the man. Just as he neared him, Cronus turned around. Harry swung and connected a right fist in the man's chin.

Cronus stumbled backwards, but not into recognizable Hogwarts property. He now stood on a dimly lit street. Harry watched a confused look on the man's face and then he looked around curiously.

Harry quickly followed. The air around him vibrated and then the view of the castle ended. As existence wavered, Harry found himself at Godric's Hollow, right outside his childhood home.

"Home sweet home, yes, Harry Potter?" Cronus croaked, shooting off several spells towards Harry.

Harry ducked and dodged. As Harry took cover behind a tree, he bumped into a solid mass. In the shadows, he was staring directly into his own face.

"What's going on?" the hidden-Harry questioned, a look of wild desperation on his face.

Harry was frantic. "Listen to me," he said, wiping his brow. "You have to stop. You see that man out there..."

"Cronus!"

"That's right..."

Time Traveler pushed Harry out of the way and cast a spell. Harry turned around just in time to see Cronus deflect it, but stumbled, showing even more weakness than before. Harry charged at him, throwing wild spells but Cronus was able to anticipate the moves. He had no time to warn the Time Traveler a second time.



Harry reached Cronus. This time Cronus connected with a punch of his own.

The scene flickered.

Harry and Cronus remained where they were, on the street at Godric's Hollow, but the smooth surface of the road melted away. Cronus stumbled, but kept his footing on the newly formed dirt street. Harry stole a glance around before turning his attention back to Cronus.

The Time Traveler was gone. The houses looked the same, but they looked newer. The trees that towered over them previously had shrunk considerably, others had disappeared altogether. Harry guessed they had traveled now into the past. *How far?* he wondered.

There was no more time to think about it. Cronus had lunged at him, screaming and wheezing, and clamped his teeth into Harry's arm. Harry let out a wail of pain and dropped his wand. Cronus pushed his younger self backwards into the dusty road and stepped closer to him. He wiped the blood away from his mouth and kicked the wand away into the bushes.

"Harry Potter, Harry Potter," Cronus mused.

He stepped closer, but looked as if he couldn't find his balance. Harry guessed that his body and mind could no longer take the sudden jumps through time. Harry himself was feeling sick to his stomach. He could only imagine how his counterpart was feeling.

"I tried to do this the easy way," Cronus said, looking as if he were drunk waving his wand in Harry's direction. "I tried to reason with you, didn't I? I explained it to you, yes, I explained it." He cleared his throat, attempting to speak again. "You can't fight destiny, Harry Potter. Just accept your place like I have. Accept it, accept it."

Harry shook his head. "I won't," Harry cried.

"Your damn principles!" Cronus shouted. "You would die for them?"

"I have before, I'll do it again," Harry replied. He nudged himself backwards, keeping Cronus in his sight. "You seem to forget that you had the same principles once. Do you remember?"

"Bah!" Cronus screamed, quivering. His left eye looked as if it was struggling to move as his vision darted all around, assessing the situation. "That was a long time ago, wasn't it?" He stepped closer, pressing his foot into the sandy path. "It doesn't matter, Harry Potter. After you're gone, I'll just start this all over again..."

There was a glint in Cronus's eyes, a crazed look as he raised the wand and attempted to steady it. The moment had come again for him to kill.

*"Stupefy!"*

Voices rang out from behind Cronus. The man's head jolted forwards in a sickening snap and he tumbled to the earth. Harry breathed a sigh of relief and attempted to locate his rescuers. Two men were standing a few meters back, wands both pointing towards the place where Cronus had been standing.

"You there," the first man called. "Are you hurt?"

Harry was hurt, in several places, but it was nothing serious. He hoisted himself to his feet and shook his head. "I'm fine," he answered. "Thanks." He took a chance to look at them. Each of them wore the colors of the Auror department, but they look rather old-fashioned.

"Evans, check on that man," the leader of the group said.

"Right, Cadmus," Evans said. He went forward to check on Cronus.

"You're lucky that we were here," Cadmus said. "What seems to be the dispute?"

Harry wandered off the bush that his wand was hidden in. "Well," Harry began. He reached into the bush, scratching his hand in the process. "He attacked me. I was defending myself."

"Is that so?" Cadmus questioned.

"Yeah," Harry replied. He finally found his wand and pulled it from the plant. He brushed off the grime and stuck his wand back into his pocket.

"Cadmus," one of the men said. He stood up from checking on the body and pushed his red hair out of his eyes. "You're not going to believe this. You know who this is?"

Cadmus turned his attention away from Harry and looked towards Evans, who had rolled Cronus onto his back and was staring at the man's face. He looked up at Cadmus and grinned. "It's that crazy inventor from down the street."

"No kidding?" Cadmus replied. He strolled over to the fallen gentleman and sat on his haunches. He pulled back the straggly black hair and investigated the face. "It sure does look like old Cronus." He looked back at Harry. "You said he attacked you?"

"Yeah," Harry answered.

"Maybe he wasn't too keen on you wearing the same outfit," Evans said, chuckling.

Cadmus stood back up to his feet and scratched his head. "You like to think you're funny, Evans," he muttered. He shook his head. "No, the old man is most likely still sore over last month."

Evans considered the theory. "I'd be angry too if the government banned me from working on my life's work," he replied. "You're high up with the Ministry. Did they really send people to confiscate his journals?"

Cadmus shrugged. "If it happened, I wasn't involved."

Evans rolled his eyes. "You'd say that either way, wouldn't you?"

Cadmus nodded. "Let's revive him," he said, "and get him back home." He searched the neighborhood, checking out each house. "Which one is it?"

Harry pointed several houses away. "The one with the tree in the front yard," he replied.

Cadmus smiled. "You'll be leading the way then," he said. Cadmus stretched out his wand and chanted the reviving charm.

Cronus blinked wearily. He sat up and looked around, noticing the two magical law enforcement officers. "What do you want?"

"Mr. Cronus, we're going to take you back home," Cadmus said.

"You don't know where I live," Cronus bellowed, his eyes darting around in every which way. "I don't even know where I am, do I?" He looked at Harry. "You! Tell them where we came from, the year."

"Mr. Cronus," Evans said, gripping the man's arm. "You're in the year 1776-"

"Wasn't asking you, was I?" Cronus bellowed, turning back to Harry. Harry simply swallowed apprehensively and shrugged. Cronus was enraged. "We were fighting, weren't we? And we were sent here, to the past. Tell them!"

Cadmus gripped his other arm. "The only fight happening right now is in the New World," he said. "And I can assure you that you haven't been there."

"Don't patronize me," Cronus said, his words starting to slur. "Don't tell me where I've been. I've traveled the great roads of time, haven't I? I've lived in other timelines, yes, yes."

Cadmus and Evans exchanged doubtful looks. Harry picked up Cronus's wand and started to lead the way towards the house in which the real William Cronus was residing. He hoped the inventor was not home. He could only imagine the shocked face of the men when they see they've made a mistake. Cronus continued to ramble on about his time travels as they neared the house.

"You think maybe one stunner would have sufficed?" Cadmus whispered to Evans.

Evans chuckled. "We might have overdid it."

Harry approached the door and knocked. After a minute, no one answered. Harry knocked again. Cadmus pushed Harry out of the way and slammed the door hard, which opened the large wooden barrier into the house. Harry led the way in. Cadmus and Evans guided the rambling Cronus inside.

Harry nervously looked around for any signs of the inventor. The house was quiet and there definitely seemed to be void of human occupancy at the moment. He noticed a table with a book on it and frowned, realizing that it was the journal of the real Cronus that he had seen on the tour. He opened it up and read the familiar handwriting.

Cadmus and Evans approached him without Cronus.

"He wants to talk to you," Cadmus said, "but don't worry. He can't even stand on his own power. If you want us to stay, we'll stay."

Harry shook his head. "I can handle it," he replied, showing that he had the man's wand anyhow.

Cadmus thanked Harry for his help and then left.

"Harry Potter, a word, in here," Cronus called.

Harry strolled towards the voice, passing familiar objects and pictures he had seen in the guided tour in the future. Finally he entered the sitting room of the house. Cronus was seated on a chair, grinning like a mad man.

"My wand, Harry Potter," Cronus said, stretching out his hand. It was trembling far more violently than ever before. Harry looked at his face. One eye seemed to be lazier than the other. The man was falling apart. These trips through time that they had just gone through had taken a big toll on Cronus.

"You know I can't do that," Harry said. He leaned against the table that was in the room.

"You can!" Cronus muttered. "We have a fight to finish, don't we? Yes, yes, we do. That's how it's supposed to happen."

"Look at you," Harry said, motioning towards the man. "You're already done. I'm not fighting you anymore."

"I killed her," Cronus said, wheezing. "Now kill *me*, Harry Potter."

"I'm *not* a killer," Harry said, his teeth clenching.

"She recognized me," Cronus said, attempting to cackle, but losing his breath. "She said your name when I crept up on her..."

"Shut up."

"...right in the bed you made love to her in," Cronus continued.

"SHUT UP!"

"How does it feel, Harry Potter, to know that she recognized who her killer was?"

Harry was about to lunge towards the man, but he felt himself being magically held back. He trembled angrily as he was unable to advance. "Let me go!" Harry bellowed. He was tired of being strong. He needed to release his anger. He needed to raise his wand.

Cronus looked from Harry to a point behind him. His crazed eyes suddenly widened, and a manically grin broke out upon his quivering face. He cackled uncontrollably. "William Emmett Cronus," he croaked.

Harry watched a figure enter in his peripheral vision. The man stood there and looked as if he were shaking his head. "Unbelievable," William muttered. From the angle Harry was watching, William did resemble Cronus in a remarkable way. He understood how Cadmus and Evans could make that mistake.

William entered Harry's vision. Harry gasped.

William smiled, his emerald eyes shimmering behind a pair of spectacles, his long, straggly raven-colored hair brushing the sides of his face.

“Harry Potter, I presume,” William said. “It’s been a long time since I saw *that* face in the mirror.”

Out- out are the lights- out all!  
And, over each quivering form,  
The curtain, a funeral pall,  
Comes down with the rush of a storm,  
While the angels, all pallid and wan,  
Uprising, unveiling, affirm  
That the play is the tragedy, "Man,"  
And its hero the Conqueror Worm.

-Edgar Allan Poe, *The Conqueror Worm*

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A person often meets his destiny of the road he took to avoid it.

-Jean de La Fontaine

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## Chapter Twenty-Six

### William's Tale

Harry had no choice but to obey the orders of the Imperius Curse that was placed on him. Whereas he could normally throw the curse off with ease, the man was able to hold him as no other man could do. The voice in his head said, "Sit," and why would he argue, especially against his own voice. Harry sat on the wooden chair and waited for another command.

"I'm going to let you go," William said, "and you *won't* cause any more disturbances."

Harry's own will power returned. He turned his head towards the newest addition to the room. Here was yet *another version* of himself. It was difficult to wrap his mind around it. How was this possible? He studied the man's face, catching a glimpse of the lightning bolt shaped scar hidden behind his bangs.

Cronus cackled weakly. Harry looked towards the old man. As he wheezed loudly, his eyes fluttered and he struggled to keep them



open. He held out his arm, towards them both, and it trembled viciously.

"Well, this isn't good," William said, rubbing his head in his hands. "No, no, no, this isn't good." The man looked just as perplexed by the situation as Harry was. He shook his head and kept repeating his negativity.

Harry needed answers. "Where's the real William Cronus then?" he asked.

William stopped and snapped his head towards Harry. "You're looking at him," he answered simply.

Harry shook his head and frowned. "There's no need to play these games," Harry said. He motioned towards the quivering form of Cronus. "I did that enough with him. I know you're me."

William chuckled. "You misunderstood me then," he replied. Placing his hand upon his chest, he continued, "You are looking at the real William." He pointed towards Harry. "And *I'm* looking at him as well."

"Wait, you mean...?"

"There never was a William Emmett Cronus," William replied. "Harry Potter *is* William Cronus, or William Cronus *is* Harry Potter, any way you really want to look at it."

"William Emmett Cronus," Cronus muttered from his seat.

"I don't really understand," Harry said.

William smirked. "No, I wouldn't expect you to," he said. He pulled a chair towards him and sat down upon it. "I've pondered over it for thirty years and *I* still don't know if I even understand it."

"Thirty years?" Harry repeated, astounded. "Have you been stuck back here for that long?"

"Thirty damn years," William growled. "Longer, if you count all my trips through time, trying to return home." He pointed at Harry and

waved his fingers. "And I know the books all say I was born in 1610, but that's simply the date I made up."

"How did you get here?" Harry asked.

"I suppose I could ask you the same thing and we might have similar answers," Cronus replied, scratching his chin. "But seeing as your story is most likely a sequel to my own, I'll fill you in."

Harry nodded, sitting on the edge of his seat. "I'm listening."

---

Harry Potter was approaching a ripe age of sixty. He had lived a great life thus far, and hopefully had plenty more wonderful years to go. Ginny was still writing for the *Daily Prophet*. Each of their children were married with children of their own. Harry was most likely going to retire soon from the Ministry. He was getting far too old to be an Auror anymore. The less demanding job as Defense against the Dark Arts professor should give him plenty of things to do if he accepted it.

"Harry," a voice called to him. "Harry."

Harry snapped away from his thoughts. He immediately felt the ache of his heart. He looked at Hermione beside him, the streaks of silver in her aging hair. She smiled warmly as she handed him a cup of tea. He gladly took it and sipped, not caring how hot it was.

"Thought you could use it," Hermione replied.

"Thanks," Harry said. He looked down at the cup, catching his reflection in the tea. He tore his gaze away from it. "I just wish I knew how it happened, you know?"

Hermione nodded. "I'm sure Ginny will be fine. The best healers at St. Mungo's are helping her around the clock. Just hold on a little longer."

"Hermione, I appreciate your optimism, but we have to face reality," Harry said. "If they don't know how it happened, then how the hell are they going to fix it?"

Hermione shuddered and wiped a tear away from her face. "What if there was a way to find out?" she asked.

Harry frowned at her. "What do you mean?" he asked. "Nobody was home."

Hermione shook her head. "Nobody has to be," she replied. She reached around her neck, pulling a gold chain. From beneath her shirt came a small hourglass.

"Where did you get the Time-Turner?" Harry exclaimed.

"Shh," Hermione said, pulling him away and taking him towards a corner for privacy. "We recently found the journals of William Emmett Cronus, the inventor who created this thing. We've been planning on using it for purely historical accuracy."

"Hermione, you can't possibly want me to use this," Harry whispered.

"You're talking to the same woman who helped you save Buckbeak and Sirius," she said, holding the hourglass in her hands. "Of course I want you to use this. We have to figure out what happened to Ginny."

"That's brilliant," Harry said, grasping for the magical object.

Hermione slapped his hands away. "Wait," she said, scolding him. "Listen to me, we are breaking over a dozen laws by doing this. Kingsley might have turned a blind eye, but he's not minister anymore. There's one thing you *cannot* do. Promise me this one thing."

"Sure, sure, I promise," Harry said quickly.

"You *cannot*, I repeat, *cannot* interfere with the events that have already happened," Hermione said, giving him the eye. "This trip is to find out what happened to Ginny and that's it. Under no circumstances are you to *stop* anything. Under no circumstances are you to interact with anyone, especially yourself."

"Myself?" Harry questioned, grinning, the idea changing his emotions. "What's the worst that can happen? I have a nice little chat with Harry Potter from the past?"

“Harry, I’m serious.”

Harry shrugged. “What do you want me to do?” he asked. “Should I disguise myself? I could change my name. I could be...” He looked at the Time-Turner. “William Cronus, did you say? I could just tell people that’s my name.”

Hermione rolled her eyes. She pulled the gold chain from around her neck. The hourglass hung loosely in the air as she handed it to Harry. Before she let go, she said, “Six times should take you back six hours.”

“Six times,” Harry repeated.

“Do it now, otherwise we will have lost our window to do this,” she said. “I’m going to go stall everyone. And don’t forget what I said.” She gave him a stern look. She let go of the chain and backed away from him. She turned and then walked through the hospital door.

Harry placed the chain around his neck, touched the warm hourglass in his hands, and slowly turned the object over six times.

---

Harry burst into his house six hours earlier. He searched his memories, trying desperately to remember where Ginny had been found. It was in the kitchen, he remembered, and he rushed towards the room. As he neared the door, he stopped, remembering what Hermione had said. He was here to observe, not to interfere.

It would be a great time to have the Cloak, but he had passed that on to Albus twenty years ago, and Albus had already passed it on to his own son. He struggled to remember how to Disillusion himself. He swore, trying to clear his mind. He had done this plenty of times during his Auror duties. It wasn’t coming to him.

As he thought, the kitchen door opened. Ginny stopped in surprise. “You’re home early,” she said, reaching up and kissing him lightly on the cheek. Her hair was graying as well. “How did the meeting go with Lippert?”

Harry shook the confusion of the last six hours away from his mind. "He, uh, he..." Harry started. "He said that I have the job if I wanted it. Once the new school year begins."

"Hm," Ginny said, opening a closet and rummaging through the contents. "What do you think?" she said over her shoulder. "You ready to give up dealing with criminals and dark wizards?"

Harry half-heartedly nodded. "I like excitement," he said, "but I'm ready for something like this." He watched her stretch to reach something above her. "What are you looking for?" he asked.

"We have scurvy-grass, daisy seeds, crushed raven beak, but we don't have... oh, hold it," Ginny said, moving a bottle. "I think we have a winner," she said, turning around and holding up a small bottle. "Newt's eyes. I knew I had some in here."

Harry repeated the ingredients to himself. "Ginny, are you making a homemade pregnancy test?" he questioned, looking down at her stomach.

Ginny laughed. "It's not for me, stud," she said. "Remember how old we are?" She led him into the kitchen where a cauldron was sitting on the stove. "It's for Lily."

Harry did a double take. "Lily's pregnant again?" he questioned. "Why don't I know about this?"

Ginny struggled to open the bottle. "She's just owled me fifteen minutes ago," she replied, grunting as she tried in vain to twist the lid off. "I don't think she's even told Scorpius yet. I'm going over to their place with the potion as soon as it's done to check." She finally handed the bottle to Harry. "Open this, please."

Harry easily opened the bottle and handed it back to her. He studied the simmering cauldron for a few seconds. "Ginny, is this safe for you to be doing?"

Ginny shrugged. "As long as I do it right," she replied. "It's only in the first five minutes that the potion is potentially dangerous. As long as I

don't accidentally drop something into it, or spill any before that, I'll be fine."

She tipped four newt's eyes into the cauldron. The small orbs made a very small splash as they hit the water. The liquid immediately turned blue. Harry watched as she grabbed the lid and went to put it back on the bottle. All of a sudden, the lid slipped out of her hand and plummeted towards the cauldron.

With his Seeker's reflexes, Harry whipped out his wand to catch the lid, but hit his arm off the table counter in the process, dropping his wand. He swore, but noticed that Ginny had caught the lid above the cauldron and all harm was averted. Harry sighed...

...but as he looked up, the shelf above the stove dropped off the wall. Harry realized that as he hit the table, it had loosened the shelf. There was nothing he could do to stop it.

The cauldron exploded right in Ginny's face.

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Harry sat outside St. Mungo's hours later. It was dark. Night had fallen and he felt numb inside. It all felt unreal. Could it have been *him* who had caused Ginny's accident, even the first time around? He had gone back in time to find out what had caused the accident, only to have caused that accident that would inspire him hours later to go back in time.

"You feeling all right?" Hermione asked, sitting down next to him.

"It was *my* fault," Harry said. "And now there's nothing they can do to help her. How do you think I feel?"

"No, Harry, it was my fault," Hermione admitted. "William warned us about this type of thing in his journals." Hermione pulled two rugged looking books from her bag. She handed it to Harry. "See," she said, flipping through the pages, "it's called a predestination paradox."

Harry numbly looked over the writings, observing the scribbles in the books. He couldn't help but notice how much the handwriting looked

like his own. Harry closed the book and gripped them against his chest.

"Give me the Time-Turner," Hermione said.

Harry stood up quickly. "The farthest back it can take you is ten hours, right?" He held up the hourglass that was still around his neck. "That's about the time I went to Hogwarts. I can just warn myself and Ginny, right. Prepare them?"

"Harry, stop it," Hermione said, watching in horror as Harry had already started rotating the hourglass. "This isn't going to end well. Give me the Time-Turner."

But Harry was already gone.

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Harry wasted no time running into the front door of his house. As he burst in, he looked around for Ginny as quickly as he could. Where were they? He turned around after checking the sitting room only to find two wands pointed directly at his chest.

"Who are you?" past-Harry commanded.

"I'm from ten hours in the future," Harry quickly tried to explain. He looked towards Ginny. "Whatever you do tonight, *do not* attempt to make potions."

"What?" Ginny questioned. "Who are you really?"

"I think I can skip my meeting," past-Harry said. "You," he motioned his wand towards him, "can come with me to the Ministry so we can figure this out."

"Ginny is going to die if you don't listen to me!" Harry growled, pleading with them.

Past-Harry's face turned furious. "You dare come into my house and threaten my wife?" he shouted. "You dare even speak like that when I have the upper hand?"

"You don't understand," Harry said, holding up the Time-Turner.

"Nice try," Ginny said. "Those little objects no longer exist. Time travel has also been banned. Now my husband has you for trespassing, threatening an Auror's wife, and for the possession of an illegal object."

"Listen to-"

"Stop talking," past-Harry commanded.

"No!" Harry screamed, whipping out his wand. "Listen to me-"

"*Expelliarmus!*" past-Harry shouted.

Harry was quick as well, placing a shield charm around himself. The spell rebounded and struck Ginny. Ginny's wand went flying away from her. She scrambled away to find where it went.

Harry dropped the shield and threw a spell just as past-Harry recovered and did the same. The red jets of light connected in the air and absorbed into each other. Both Harrys stopped and studied the small growing black speck before them.

Seconds later, when the men were sucked into the vortex, there was an explosion when the Time-Turner passed through as well. The rip in existence closed in on itself and the men were gone.

Ginny Potter was unconscious on the floor.

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"That's how I ended up here," William said, pacing back and forth across the floor now. "I looked desperately around for William Cronus, hoping he'd be able to help me. It eventually became apparent to me that he did not exist, and soon I realized that it had been me all along. He invented the Time-Turner, right? Well, I had the instructions with me and one of the objects myself, but that wasn't helping me. Eventually I managed to create the Time Potion, but I told no one. All my trips into the future took me nowhere but my own 1700s timeline."



“You’re broken off the Harry Potter timeline,” Harry replied, pointing to Cronus. “He has as well.”

William gave Harry a menacing look. “Don’t you think I know that?” he asked. “That doesn’t mean I don’t want to get home. That’s all I want to do, mind you, die where I’m supposed to die.”

Cronus moaned as he remained on his couch.

William stared at the replica. “It was easy creating an identity. You make things up. No one checks it now like they do in our time. All I had to do was claim I lived in this house all my life, and who was going to correct me?”

Harry looked from William to Cronus and then back again. “So you’re really the first one, aren’t you?” he asked. “You’re the one that started it all.”

William growled. “Tell me your story.”

Harry spent the next half-hour explaining what had happened. William looked displeased with the events that followed his departure. The look on his face was frightening when Harry explained Ginny’s fate.

“How many times has this happened?” William questioned.

Harry shrugged. “I can’t say,” he replied. “I was also thinking, how many of us are stuck in the past like you are?”

William smiled. “Perhaps more than I originally thought,” he replied. “Perhaps that is where these murderous replicas have ended up. Can you imagine, maybe Merlin was us. Maybe even one of the Three Brothers. What was our ancestor’s name?”

“Ignotus,” Harry replied.

“His name means *unknown*,” William replied, holding his chin. “Something interesting to consider.”

Harry agreed. “William, what happened to the past version of us when you two went through the rip?”

William shrugged. "I never saw him again." he replied. "Judging from your story, that version of ourselves is the one that started the cycle." He took a couple steps towards Cronus. The old man was mumbling incoherently, his eyes darting around in every direction. "Are you him?" William whispered.

"William Cronus, aren't... aren't I?" Cronus mumbled.

"No," William went on. "You might as well be though." He reached his wrinkled hand down towards his collar and grasped it, bringing Cronus closer to him. "You deserve to die, you filthy excuse for me. You dare place a hand on my wife?"

"Ginny... recognized us..." Cronus managed to say.

"I have spent thirty years away from her," William growled. "*THIRTY YEARS*, do you hear me?! I have been trying to get back home every minute of every hour of every day since I've been here. And you *kill* her?" Cronus placed the tip of his wand against the chin of Cronus.

"Harry Potter..." Cronus croaked.

"*Avada Kadavra!*" William screamed, the light igniting the room in a green glow.

Harry flinched. It was odd how he felt no remorse for the action. It was odd how he offered no help for the threatened. He did feel uneasy inside, watching himself die. An elaborate form of suicide is what it was. Harry came closer to the seat, looking towards Cronus. He was leaning back in his seat, crazed eyes open.

"One problem taken care of, yes?" William replied, grinning. "Now to deal with you."

Harry looked up quickly at William. "What do you mean, me?"

William smiled a toothy grin. "I figured you'd understand," he said. "This is exactly what the authorities were afraid of." He motioned towards Cronus and Harry. "When I told them about my theories, they took my life's work. I was lucky enough to keep my journals. But I

can't afford for them to know this. Surely you can understand this, can't you?"

"I'm your past!" Harry said.

"My past?" William repeated. "I have no past. You said so yourself. All I want to do is get home. That's all you want to do, isn't it? Wouldn't you do anything at all to accomplish that? I need my research back so I can figure this out. It's just unfortunate luck for you that you're in my way." He reached around his neck and showed the Time-Turner. "This is all I have left."

"What does it matter if you get your research back?" Harry questioned. "You can't make it past 1776 anyhow. Do you know why? This is the year *you* die. Surely you know that."

"I will not die back here."

Harry raised his wand at the slightest moment of distraction. "William, you know what's going to happen if we both use a spell. Let's not do this--"

*"Avada Kadavra!"*

*"Expelliarmus!"*

The spells met in midair. Chaos. Explosion. The hole in existence.

Two living bodies and one deceased slipped into the hole.

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Harry landed with a thud.

The world was no longer swirling all around him. Papers were blowing in the wind though. White sheets of parchment were scattering themselves around. There was a book right beneath Harry's face. As he raised himself, the wind turned the pages, skimming through each of the entries.

Harry closed the book. It was the journal of William Emmett Cronus, the one that William had been using. He picked it up, as well as the one beneath it, and placed it in his pocket.

Harry looked left. Upon the dusty street were a gold chain and a Time-Turner. Harry picked this up as well and placed it around his own neck.

He gripped his wand in his hand, ready to duel if needed, but the only sound was wind whistling through his ear. He forced himself to stand and looked around. Pieces of furniture were scattered about from the room they were just in. Harry noticed a wand beneath a chair. He walked towards it, bent down, and picked up the wand of one of the replicas.

It was then that Harry noticed Cronus. He was sprawled out behind the chair, mouth open, eyes wide, the murdered body pointing its extremities in every which way. Cronus was dead. Harry jumped over the chair and bent down closer to the body. Beside it were sitting two books, the book that had been sent to Hermione, and the book that provided the history of the modern age. Harry placed them in his pockets as well. Harry patted the man down for anything else.

"Hey, mister, what happened here?"

Harry glanced up. A young boy, maybe twelve, was standing there with an expression of horror. "There was an accident," Harry answered. "Can you contact the Ministry for me?"

"Who *is* it?" the boy asked.

"William Cronus," Harry replied.

The boy gasped. "*Really?*" he replied. "No one's seen him for four years. Are you sure it's him?"

Harry nodded without saying anything else. He stood up from his haunches and strolled over to the little boy. "You haven't seen anyone else around here, have you?"

The boy shook his head. "No. Are you okay, sir? You don't look so good."

Harry didn't answer. Realizing he was still in Godric's Hollow, he walked away from the boy. In all honesty, he didn't feel right. His body ached all over. His mind was running in a hundred different directions at once, but they continued to settle on one person. Her name was Ginny. He still wasn't home with her. She was still dead, perhaps never to return to the living.

Harry reached up and gripped the Time-Turner. Was William lost again? Harry theorized that that in order to take a trip as they had through time, someone must have a time device or potion. William no longer wore one. Was he gone forever?

Harry entered the graveyard. As he did, he pulled out the two wands. He examined them, feeling out which one was his. He knew what he needed to do in order to return to his original time, but there was no way to know when he would return. He didn't have any control over the whereabouts of his landing.

It was a risk he'd have to take... *in order to return safely to Ginny...* he touched the wand tips together and said a simple spell...

*It's not what's happening to you now or what has happened in your past that determines who you become. Rather, it's your decisions about what to focus on, what things mean to you, and what you're going to do about them that will determine your ultimate destiny.*

*-Anthony Robbins*

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## **Chapter Twenty-Seven**

### **Atonement**

Harry Potter was alone inside Godric's Hollow cemetery. He shivered as he opened his eyes. The wands were still in his hands. He gripped them both tightly, so hard that his knuckles turned white. Pain shot up from his hands and into his arms, tingling the rest of his body. The sensation buckled his knees and he sank down into the soft mud.

Rain was bleeding from the sky in an endless flow. Lightning tore across the wounded black canvas, lighting up the abrasion within the clouds. The tombstones radiated the light back to Harry's disturbed eyes. He groped towards the stones, feeling himself tremble as the thunder growled in response.

He kneeled in front of one tombstone. The words etched into the granite could be seen faintly through the shadows. More lightning lit up the tomb and Harry read the name of William Emmett Cronus. The same words and the same dates stared back at him. There had been no change since the last time he was here. Harry dropped the wands and reached his hand up to touch the name.

It was *him* beneath the ground. Buried six feet down, he would find a man with raven-colored hair, green eyes, and a lightning bolt shaped scar. Harry Potter was alive, but Harry Potter was also dead. The thoughts of his own mortality plagued his very existence. Was it really him below the earth? The man within was insane, obsessed with Ginny, and willing to do anything to have her.

*Am I really so different?* Harry thought. After all, did he not do the same thing? Did he not claim he was trying to make the world a better place for Ginny? Did he not do everything in his power to save the woman he loved, even go as far as traveling through time to do so? If that was not obsession, what would you call it? Was Harry not just as insane as his counterpart was? Perhaps the only difference was the man below was dead, free of this hell they had created together.

He shook with anger, he shook with fear, he shook because he could not control it. His mind hurt in ways he didn't think were possible. It was ready to crack, to fall completely apart. He could *feel* the parts of his mind straining under the pressure. What would cause it to finally topple? What would make him travel down that road?

Harry reached into the pockets of his cloak. He placed the books upon the ground in a neat little stack. Next he placed the journals of Cronus beside the books. He reached up and took off the Time-Turner, placing it between the two stacks. The last object that was emptied from his possession was the photograph of his family. He kissed it lightly and propped it up against the tombstone.

Harry closed his eyes. It had all been a circle. It was a never-ending loop of damnation. Here he was at the end of another cycle. Or was it the beginning? He laughed out loud, noting that that perhaps the ending was the beginning. There really was neither start nor finish when it came to circles. Everything just repeated itself.

Harry looked at the objects again, each one growing damp in the downpour. Here was every object he needed to start the events afresh. The books, the journals, the Time-Turner, the picture, the cloak... They were the ingredients that he needed. All he had to do was follow the formula set forth by the one before him.

Harry had claimed adamantly to Cronus that destiny did not control his fate. He had advocated that choices were what shaped life. As the rain beat down upon him, as the lightning flashed and the thunder rolled, as he knelt before his centuries-old remains, he no longer believed that. He had no choice in the matter. It was his destiny to pick up where Cronus had left off.

Harry held his head in agony and brought his face closer to the ground. The soaked earth felt soothing upon his forehead. He allowed the rain to fall upon the back of his head, providing him the cleansing that he hoped would help him. After several minutes, he threw himself back, looked up into the heavens, and let out an inhuman scream.

Shaking beyond control, his hand trembling, he picked up one of the wands and pointed it hastily towards the objects upon the ground. They seemed to taunt him, daring him to use them, to give into the perpetual sequence of events.

What choice did he have?

Harry clenched his jaw and bared his teeth. His whole arm was shaking with frustration. His mind wavered, picturing Ginny in his head, his loving precious Ginny, who still needed help, who still needed rescuing, who still needed him. He was failing her by not trying. It was up to him to right the wrongs. It was always up to him. It was always his responsibility. It was always his fault.

“NO!” Harry shrieked. “I CAN’T!”

It was destiny.

The wand trembled. Harry dropped it into the pile of objects, realizing that it was not the one he had been using all his life. As rain beat him, he wrestled with his own mind, his own choices, his own destiny.

As quickly as he could, he picked up his own wand and made the most important decision of his life.

“*Incendio!*” he shouted.

Fire erupted from the tip of the wand, consuming the pile of discarded opportunities. The heat from the flames could not stifle the weeping. The fire licked the pages of the journals, turning the paper into blackened ash. The fire consumed the Time-Turner, cracking the glass. Destiny be damned, Harry had made the choice that mattered most.



Harry quickly ripped off the black cloak and placed it on the fire as well.

As the fire burned, Harry began to lose consciousness. The rain touched his naked body. The thunder growled in approval.

“Harry, Harry.”

Someone was calling his name.

“Harry, Harry!”

A woman’s voice.

Harry opened his eyes. He was not in a graveyard. He was indoors. In fact, it looked exactly like King’s Cross station. He wasn’t sure how he ended up here. A different voice greeted him this time.

“Harry, it’s been far too long.”

Harry watched two purple boots step right in front of him. He followed them up until he saw the familiar robes, followed by the long, flowing beard, and the half-moon spectacles. Harry sighed relief and grinned.

“Professor Dumbledore.”

*A man should never be ashamed to own that he is wrong, which is but saying in other words that he is wiser today than he was yesterday.*

*-Alexander Pope*

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## **Chapter Twenty-Eight**

### **Dumbledore's Answers**

Harry managed to stand up without any trouble. His body and mind may have been aching seconds ago, but in the presence of his former Headmaster and the once-visited King's Cross, Harry felt surprisingly rejuvenated. He looked at his body, expecting to see the skin of his exposed skin, but he was relieved to see that he was fully clothed.

"Have a seat, Harry," the old man said.

Harry turned his attention back to Dumbledore. He was sitting on a bench, almost as if he was waiting for the next train to come through the station and pick him up. The old man smiled warmly at Harry and beckoned him closer.

Harry took a step through the vastly empty lobby. It was strange to have returned to this place. Even though he had stepped foot in the train station less than a year ago to drop off James and Albus, he didn't associate this blank location with his real life version. This was, at least in Harry's mind, the same station he had traveled to almost two decades ago. As he took the seat beside the man with the purple robes and half-moon spectacles, he felt the familiarity spread through his body.

"As I said a few moments ago, Harry, it is good to see you again," Dumbledore said. "My only wish is that we could meet sometime under better circumstances."

Harry nodded. "I've messed up big time, haven't I?" he asked. The question was far too casual, but Harry felt an overwhelming sense of peace. Perhaps it was the locale.

"You *have* been a rather busy man," Dumbledore said, his eyes twinkling. "We've had quite the number of adjustments around here, people checking in and out almost on a regular basis. I had to say goodbye to your lovely wife moments ago."

Harry turned his head to meet his eyes. "Ginny?" Harry questioned. "Goodbye? Do you mean...?"

"Ginevra has returned," Dumbledore said simply, and offered no further explanation.

Harry sat in silence with him for a few moments. No noise wafted in from outside sources, no train whistles, just silence.

"Professor," Harry started, "have I fixed the things I destroyed?"

Dumbledore pat Harry upon the knee. "You must stop blaming yourself," he said. "You have only entered into this story at the end. What was set in motion started before you even entered into the tale. You, Harry, have written the proverbial 'the end' upon the last page."

"But it *was* me," Harry countered.

"Yes," Dumbledore said, "and no. Altering time is a precarious task. Your future self, albeit his intentions were righteous, fell victim to the most powerful human emotion we are blessed and cursed to feel."

"Love?"

"Love, indeed," Dumbledore replied. "He took it upon himself to discover the cause of his bride's ailment, but could not stand idly by and watch her hurt herself. Upon doing so *became* the very reason he traveled back in time to begin with. Do you think less of him for wanting to protect his wife?"

Harry shook his head. "I would have done the same thing," he said.

Dumbledore smiled. "You find me a man who would say otherwise and I'll call him the most unfortunate soul alive," he said. "Love has driven men to even worse things, I would say."

Harry took his hand and slid it into his mess of hair. He pushed it back and let it return into position. "You have to understand why I feel like I do," Harry said. "What does it matter if it's my future self or not? It was still *me*."

"The human body and the human mind are not designed for continuous time travel," Dumbledore said, "but neither is the human soul. The moment your future self made the decision to subject himself repeatedly to this form of abuse is the moment he sealed his fate. It only takes several journeys, Harry, before you can no longer claim to be part of your own timeline."

"Is that what I was just feeling?" Harry asked, referring to the graveyard. "My body and mind never hurt so much."

"It was not your body or your mind that plagued you," Dumbledore replied. "Your soul was bending. If you would have chosen to further the vicious cycle, you would have no longer been able to call yourself Harry Potter and be accurate in your declaration."

"If I chose," Harry repeated, shaking his head. "This is where I'm confused. Do we really have choices, Professor, or is everything predestined? I mean, Gideon and Fabian seemed pretty clear that things happened the way they were supposed to happen."

Dumbledore smiled. "Yes, I had forgotten you had the pleasure of meeting the Prewett twins," he replied. "Charming fellows when they're not warning of forthcoming peril, I assure you." He cleared his throat. "But on to your question."

"It is difficult to explain the ways of the dead to the ways of the living," he went on. "There are certain possibilities that benefit the whole, certain outcomes that should right all wrongs. The prophecy, as the most blatant example, was a way to guide you into your destiny of defeating Voldemort. Had you chosen to walk away, destiny would have been forced to redefine itself. Would Voldemort have

succeeded? Would another have stepped up to take your place? For that, I do not have an answer.

"Destiny works in a way that attempts to create the best possible outcome to a situation," Dumbledore said. "The problem is that not everyone is working for the same goal. You add human influence, and the theory is contaminated. It works the same way with politics and expecting the Cannons to win the league."

Harry laughed. "Ron's still hoping," he said off-hand.

"No matter how dismal they play, Mr. Weasley still remains loyal," Dumbledore said. "William Cronus has done the same, just on a far more unhealthy level."

"I'm angry with him," Harry said, "but in a way, I can relate."

"That is because he was manipulated just as you were," Dumbledore said. "He felt he was doing the right thing. All he wanted to do was return to his own time. He simply took a more aggressive approach than you did."

"It's frightening to think I was headed down the same road," Harry said. "There were a couple times that I thought that it didn't matter who died as long as I found my way back to my real life."

"Do not make the mistake in thinking that it did not matter who died, Harry," Dumbledore said. "Each of these deaths were real, each of these deaths affected your mind in the same way. Any timeline you were part of was not a *parallel* universe, but rather the *only* universe."

"What about all the Hogwartses?" Harry asked, remembering the flickering and multiple castles.

"It may not have been reality, but they still existed, one way or another to *you*," Dumbledore answered. "When your wands reacted as they did, a rip was created, allowing you to jump instantaneously into a world that no longer existed. When elements of Time travel were introduced, your destination could have been the future or the past of any world that existed to you."

“And where did I find myself this last time?” Harry asked. “Other than Godric’s Hollow. Did I find my way back?”

Dumbledore nodded and smiled. “What’s more, Harry, is that during your battle with Cronus, you were able to warn yourself to stop,” Dumbledore replied. “Coincidentally, you listened to yourself. All tragedy has been averted.”

Harry felt positive emotions swelling upside.

“Your past self has returned to the same world he left,” Dumbledore replied. “And thanks to your decision in the graveyard, you have taken the essential elements needed out of the cycle. Without the journals, Hermione will not create another Time-Turner.”

“And Ginny is fine?”

“*And* you can take your place as a Hogwarts professor without any trouble at all,” Dumbledore said, smiling. “Maybe one day we can share the wall together as former headmasters.”

Harry smiled, sitting back in his chair. The most important questions had been answered. A few more still bothered him. “Professor,” he said, “why does it all work the way it does? Why must people suffer in order for there to be a better world?”

Dumbledore nodded. “I know you expect me to have all the answers, Harry, but this is a question in which I don’t. All I can say is that once you’ve crossed over and finally joined me for the last time, the question no longer matters. No one is concerned with such things anymore.”

“But...”

“Harry, the real problem you have to deal with is the guilt you have been feeling,” Dumbledore replied. “You have been on this adventure, claiming you were doing this for Ginny and Teddy, but what is the real reason? Think, Harry.”

Harry bit his lip in thought. The truth was hard to identify, but in this location, the answer seemed to be much easier. “I still blame myself

for their pain,” Harry said softly. “I’m terrified that they’ll realize it’s my fault someday, that they’ll finally see the light and decide that I’m not that hero everyone thinks I am... and then I’ll be alone.”

“Your wife may have been right when she said you should get some help,” Dumbledore said. “You’ve been told multiple times, but it couldn’t hurt to hear it once more.”

“No one blames me?” Harry suggested.

“Precisely,” Dumbledore replied. “And what’s more, the ones you take credit for killing, do not blame you either. They all wanted to be the one here today to explain your troubles. I felt it was only proper that it was me who handled it. I’m selfish that way, but I make no apologies for it.”

Harry smiled. He could think of no one better to explain his life and why it was the way it was.

“I feel that I owe you another explanation,” Dumbledore replied. “In your travels, you uncovered a great many things that you thought would never be possible.”

Harry agreed. “Like Draco in love with Ginny? And Hermione and me married?” He paused, searching Dumbledore’s face. “Yeah, and you, Professor. I discovered a lot of things about you. Did you really suppress Dudley’s magical ability?”

“In the altered timeline, I suppose I did,” Dumbledore replied, hanging his head low.

“And the original one?”

“I’m willing to take blame for Dudley not being magical,” Dumbledore admitted, “but not in the way you would think. Did your Aunt and Uncle refuse to take you unless I could guarantee them Dudley would turn out the same way you were sure to?” Dumbledore nodded. “And so I suggested that stress upon a wizard’s life could trigger magical abilities and to tread carefully around Dudley. Rest assured, Harry, I did *no* magic to help the process.”

“Could Dudley learn magic now?” Harry asked.

“I’m afraid it wouldn’t be possible,” Dumbledore answered. “There are several ways a wizard can lose their abilities. Vernon and Petunia’s influence suppressed the possibility in Dudley. There would be no chance at redeeming it.”

Harry shook his head, not believing that Dudley could have gone to Hogwarts just as he had. Harry paused again and looked at Dumbledore for another question.

“The answer is no, Harry,” Dumbledore replied.

Harry frowned. “You know the question?”

“I’ve been watching patiently,” Dumbledore said. “I’ve even read Draco’s book. It’s an excellent read, by the way, you should purchase a copy when it’s released.” He adjusted his glasses. “Draco is right in thinking I pulled too many strings in my days, but he makes the same mistake you have always made, Harry.”

“What’s that?” Harry asked.

“He idealizes me,” Dumbledore answered. “With the risk of sounding arrogant, I am a gifted wizard, but I am merely a human being. Nothing more, nothing less. I knew a great deal while I was alive, but *everything* was not one of them.”

Harry allowed his words to sink in. This is what he had hoped to hear.

“It is time for you to return, Harry,” Dumbledore said. “You have worried your wife and children enough as it is.”

“How long have I been gone?” Harry asked.

“Oh, you’re already back,” Dumbledore said, smiling. “Ginny found you at the graveyard. You are being monitored in St. Mungo’s as we speak.”

“Should I tell them what happened?” Harry asked.



“That is your choice,” Dumbledore replied. “Although it may be best if you just let the past go this time.” He winked at Harry. “There may even come a time that you yourself may doubt what happened to you. If that helps you forget it, you may explain it to yourself as merely a dream.”

“But it’s not, is it?” Harry asked.

Dumbledore shook his head. “No, it certainly is not.”

“Then is this goodbye?” Harry asked, standing up.

“For now,” Dumbledore replied to Harry’s curious look. “Well, every time I think we have parted for good, you visit again. Let us hope that the next time we meet, it is after a long and happy life.”

“Sounds good to me,” Harry replied.

“Do me a favor, Harry,” Dumbledore said. “Keep an eye out on your second born son. He’s going to do extraordinary things with his life, just like his father.”

Harry felt himself growing lighter and lighter. “Will do, Professor.”

“And Harry...” Dumbledore called as Harry felt he was leaving, “*Albus Severus*? Honestly!” Dumbledore chuckled.

Harry Potter had left King’s Cross.

*I find it hard to tell you  
'Cos I find it hard to take  
When people run in circles  
It's a very, very mad world.*

*-Tears for Fears, Mad World*

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## **Reckoning**

### The Twenty-First Anniversary of Voldemort's Defeat

Thirty-eight-year-old Harry Potter stopped in front of a tray of treacle tarts that were sitting on the countertop. The smell of freshly home-made dessert wafted in the air and caressed the inside of his nostrils as he breathed it in. He looked mischievously towards the entrance of the kitchen to make sure his wife wasn't about to enter the room and catch him sneaking a treat before the rest of the party had a chance to indulge. Deciding she was too preoccupied with the guests, he quickly grabbed one and stuck it into his mouth.

At the same time, he glanced up at the clock and smiled. The magical clock was similar to the Weasley one, except for the names on each of the hands. Instead of the Weasley clan, all six members of the Potter household decorated the timepiece. His eyes settled on the words "Mortal Peril" and grinned even wider, imagining his particular hand jumping in that direction if Ginny caught him. He found it amusing and comforting to know that after everything that happened, he considered something so innocent mortal peril.

Mortal peril seemed to be such a foreign subject. The events that had taken place approximately a year ago had become nothing more than a bad memory. He remembered awakening in St. Mungo's after Dumbledore's answers. Healers were tending to him when he regained consciousness. Ginny had never left his side.

Apparently, he had been missing for six days, right after the Twenty Year Celebration. Half the wizarding world had been searching for him. Ginny discovered her husband in Godric's Hollow's graveyard,

naked in front of a small bonfire and shivering next to the strange tombstone of William Emmett Cronus.

When Harry returned to consciousness, his memories were groggy. He dared not talk about what he thought had happened to himself. The idea was ludicrous, *insane*. Surely he had not been traveling the roads of time while he was missing. As the healers nursed him back to health, he simply claimed ignorance when trying to explain his disappearance.

He finished chewing the last bit of treacle tart and swallowed. The sweetness of the treat gave him a euphoric feeling, allowing him to reflect on his life. A year ago, he had sent Aurors to the Department of Mysteries and Hogsmeade to search for William Emmett Cronus. Unfortunately, the man had also disappeared from the Department and hadn't shown his face since.

It didn't ease his troubled mind. As the months waned, he was becoming more and more convinced that the events had all been an elaborate dream. It might have even been an enemy affecting his mind, slipping him a potion that caused him to see horrible things. Harry had even gone to the trouble of researching if such a potion existed. It did.

Almost a year passed and slowly the experiences were fading, just as his scar had faded. But similar to the lightning bolt shaped mark, the evidence of their stay did not fade completely. There was still the grayish scar that lingered.

For awhile, Harry discounted the lingering thoughts, but as the Twenty-First Anniversary of Voldemort's defeat neared, more and more things started to become familiar. The Ministry cancelled any official celebrations this year due to Morgan Tebron's public accusation at the previous festival.

Harry noted that his family had gathered at his house tonight, just as Cronus told him. Even though his guilty feelings were subsiding, the feeling of uneasiness was still plaguing his mind. The night carried a familiar vibe. In fact, Ginny should be coming through to check on him... now...

The door to the kitchen opened a crack. A beautiful redheaded witch peeked in. "Harry, you better not be eating them before we get a chance," she scolded with a bright smile on her face.

Harry licked the crumbs off his face and shook his head guiltily. "Do you really think I would do such a thing, Ginny?" he asked, giving her his most innocent look possible. Harry grabbed the tray and carried it towards the door.

"Oh, I don't know," Ginny remarked, looking up at Harry with her gorgeous brown eyes as he approached her. Harry dropped a few inches and presented her with a kiss. She licked her own lips as he pulled away. "I suppose you've started using treacle tart mouthwash then, huh?"

She pushed the door open and allowed him to enter the Dining Room with the tray of dessert. She led the way to the two empty chairs at the end of the table, positioned between Ron and Hermione on the left, and Neville and Hannah on the right. Ginny sat down and Harry placed the tray in the middle of the table.

As he found his seat, he looked around the room and saw empty plates and cups sitting on various chairs and coffee tables. The house had been packed an hour ago, but the rest of their friends and family had left, calling it a night. Most parties he and Ginny hosted ended with the same group of people.

As Ron reached for a treacle tart, he asked, beseechingly to Ginny or Neville, "Hey, where were Rolf and Luna tonight?"

"The Everglades, right?" Harry answered, watching Neville grab two of the desserts for himself and Hannah. Ginny looked at him curiously. "You know," Harry said, looking at her, "preparing for their next book."

As the others continued to discuss this, Ginny leaned closer to him. "I don't remember telling you that," she whispered.

Harry was fairly certain Ginny *hadn't* told him such a thing. He shook his head, trying to recall where he heard the information before. "I don't think so," Harry answered. "I might have glanced at one of your letters maybe. I can't remember."

Ginny lifted her index finger to his forehead. "You've been in your head all evening," she whispered. "What's up?"

Harry sighed inwardly. The truth was that he wasn't completely sure. He fished around his memory, but couldn't catch find anything but small thought. What was it? Why did he have the morbid thought that Ginny was in terrible danger on this particular night?

Hannah interrupted their quiet conversation. "Speaking of books," Hannah said, "Ginny, I saw your autobiography was number four on *The Daily Prophet's* bestseller list."

"Number three, actually," Ginny corrected her quickly. She turned back to Harry, ignoring the direction of the conversation concerning autobiographies. She looked at him with concerned eyes. "I still don't have an answer," she whispered.

"I have a strange feeling," Harry replied.

She placed her hand on his cheek. "Just think about what the healers said when you start getting this way," she said. "This isn't like last year. There's no one here that is going to start yelling... well, Ron might if he has anything else to drink..."

Harry chuckled in spite of the feeling. "I don't think that's it," he replied. "It's hard to explain."

"You know you can tell me anything," Ginny said. "*Anything*."

"Harry," Hermione interrupted, "you read Draco's book. Tell Ron what you thought of it."

"The hardest thing I've ever felt the need to do," Harry said, turning from Ginny, but taking her hand. After Malfoy's book was released, Harry had an odd urge to finish it. It turned out to be a surprisingly good read, despite the constant hatred towards Harry. "It's insightful," Harry concluded.

"He bashes Dumbledore in the first chapter, mate," Ron explained. "I put it down after that. I can't believe you *finished* it."

"Have you ever finished any book, Ron?" Ginny interjected.

"Ha ha," Ron replied lamely.

Harry half-smiled as he went on. "Malfoy is no different than we all were," Harry replied. "Dumbledore might have been pulling a lot of strings, but it's not possible for one man to know everything." *I've heard that somewhere before*, Harry thought mysteriously. "Not to mention, it explains how Scorpius became a decent kid. And no, Ron, it wasn't *only* Astoria's handiwork. Draco *did* do his part, surprising as that is."

They continued the conversation. After they discussed Scorpius and the possibility of their children uniting the Hogwarts houses, Ginny leaned over towards Harry again.

"You should remind Scorpius that he needs to be home in a few minutes."

Harry nodded and gave her a quick kiss. He whispered back, "So I was thinking that you could chase these friends of ours out of here, and you and I could start our own private celebration."

"I think we have to talk first," Ginny suggested, but then wagged her eyebrows. "After that, you can do whatever you want with me. *I'm yours.*"

Harry quickly excused himself from the table. When he reached the second level, he caught the last part of Albus and Scorpius's conversation about Lily breaking a chess set.

"Mr. Potter, I've got to leave," Scorpius said.

Harry motioned for the boy to follow him. "You read my mind then," he said. "Al, you coming to say goodbye?"

Albus considered it for a moment and shook his head. "Rose is still here, and Lily really needed to talk to her about something. I'm sure they won't mind if I interrupt, right, Dad?"

"Knock first, son," Harry commanded. "And don't wake up Dora."

As Scorpius descended the stairs first, Harry marveled at him. He had the sudden feeling that this twelve-year-old child was going to be his son-in-law one day. He shuddered at the thought of being related to the Malfoys. He was jolted out of his thoughts when Scorpius started talking about his daughter.

"Al told me how much she wanted to come with him in our First Year," Scorpius added. "It should be fun having her around."

Harry frowned. *Of course you like having her around*, he thought. He felt the protective side of his fatherhood surfacing, then realized he had no grounds to start any kind of worrying. He didn't even know where this silent accusation was coming from.

"Mum was happy when you connected our Floo network with yours," Scorpius said, as they reached the fireplace.

"I still prefer flying," Harry answered, gathering the floo powder, "but this saves time." He handed the container to the young Malfoy.

Scorpius laughed as he took it. "That's what Dad said," he replied.

"Goodnight, Scorpius," Harry said.

"Goodnight, Mr. Potter," Scorpius said.

When Scorpius was gone and Harry returned, his guests were leaving. He said his goodbyes with them and escorted them to the fireplace as well. As each of his friends disappeared into the flames, the morose emotion lingered. It stayed with him as he and Ginny ascended the stairwell and walked towards their bedroom.

"Have you figured out what's eating you yet?" Ginny questioned.

Another interruption came in the form of his second born. "Dad!" Albus called, peeking his head out from his bedroom. "Can I talk to you about something?"

Harry looked towards Ginny and she gave him a reluctant wave to speak to their son. Harry nodded and followed Albus into his room. His son took a seat on the bed and waited for Harry.

"What's on your mind, Al?" Harry asked.

"A couple things," Albus replied. "I'm a little worried about Lily."

Harry looked at him strangely. His full attention was on his son now. "What's wrong with her?" Harry asked. "She's okay, isn't she?"

"Yeah, I guess," Albus replied. "You know how she's *a/ways* talking?" Harry chuckled and nodded. "Well, Dad, she's become shy a lot lately."

Harry smiled. "Think about it, Al. *When* has taken on this new personality?"

"I didn't think about it before until Scorpius said something..." Albus trailed off. He opened his eyes wide. "You think Lily fancies Scorpius! Oh no! This isn't good."

"Take it easy, son," Harry replied. "Your little sister is reaching a difficult time in her life and she looks up to you. Don't make it any harder for her than it already is."

"*I'm* not going to tease her," Albus replied. "That's James's job. I just... I don't know... It's Lily. I don't want to see bad things happen to her."

"Neither do I," Harry replied.

Albus contemplated the words carefully. Harry scanned his face, realizing that his son would protect his little sister if it was the last thing he did.

"Dad, I was talking to Teddy and Victoire tonight," Albus said, "and they think I'm going to do great things just like you." He frowned as he looked at his father. "Do you think that's true?"

"No," Harry replied. "You're going to do great things period. It doesn't have to be just like me in order for them to be great."

"I don't even know what I'm supposed to do," Albus admitted.



"You're not obligated to do *anything*," Harry replied. "Sometimes by just being yourself, you're doing what you need to be doing. Sometimes it means stepping up when no one else will."

Albus smiled at him. "The Sorting Hat said something like that to me."

Harry was curious. Albus hadn't gone into much detail of what was said when he was Sorted. He had never explained a whole lot when it came to how he reached the decision of accepting the Hat's choice.

"What do you mean, son?" Harry asked.

Albus shrugged. "It talked about you for a little bit and how you were just as scared as I was," he said in a small voice, "and how you would have done great things for Hogwarts had you not been so burdened with other things. And how it had been too long since the Houses had been united."

"Did he ask you to take the responsibility?" Harry asked, curiously.

"Not really," Albus replied. "He said that there needs to be a leader and there wasn't any better choice than a Potter."

"I know you didn't *choose* Slytherin," Harry said. "Did you?"

Albus shook his head quickly. "No," he answered. "It's just that, I talked to Professor Slughorn on the train about a lot of things. I never knew this before, but Peter Pettigrew was in Gryffindor, and looked how he turned out."

"That's true," Harry replied.

"And Teddy's grandma," Albus continued. "*She* was in Slytherin."

"Yes, she was."

"I don't know," Albus replied. "I didn't *want* to be there, but now I don't think I'd like to be anywhere else."

"You're doing a lot of good things for Slytherin," Harry said.

"I don't really know what I'm doing though," Albus reiterated. "Only what you always told me to do. Did I tell you that some of the other Slytherins aren't happy with me?" He shook his head in disgust. "It's almost as if they want people to be afraid of us."

"Change is a scary thing, son," Harry replied. "Some people deal with it better than others."

"You're not feeling guilty anymore, are you, Dad?" Albus said, studying his father's face. "But you look... I don't know, scared a little bit. *I'm* the one that supposed to be scared."

Harry smiled, not answering his son's question. Instead he extracted his wand from his pocket and held it in his hands. "I've been meaning to give you something, Al," Harry said. "Since I allowed James to keep the map—"

"You know?" Albus asked in disbelief.

Harry winked at him and continued. "Since I allowed your dear brother to keep the map, I don't feel guilty about passing something on to you." He pointed his wand out the door and silently summoned an object from his room. A few seconds later, a silvery cloth landed in Harry's outstretched arms.

Albus stared in awe. "Your Invisibility Cloak?" he whispered. "Are you joking?"

Harry ran his hand through the fabric before handing it over to his son. "I'm giving you this because I know you'll take good care of it," Harry said, "and you'll never use it for personal gain."

Albus nodded excitedly. "Thanks, Dad!"

"You've earned it," Harry replied. "Now I have to talk to your mother about something. You go to sleep. You and James have to wake up early tomorrow to get back to school on time." He walked away from his son and out the bedroom door.

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Harry bolted up in bed.

He had fallen asleep. He had attempted desperately not to fall asleep. He had tried to keep his eyes open, but the hours waned on. The steady, rhythmic breathing of Ginny sleeping caused his eyelids to weigh a ton. He had lost in the game of staying awake. He didn't even remember laying back down in order to get rest.

He and Ginny spoke. It wasn't an easy conversation to have since he could only remember bits and pieces of his experiences. He tried to piece together the events with the scattered portions but couldn't fit together a coherent timeline. It was almost as if the story had been told out of order. It made little sense to him and even less sense to Ginny.

Harry wasn't sure if she believed him fully, but she said that it no longer mattered if was true or not. It was over. Harry agreed, even commenting that he couldn't be sure if any of it had really happened. Nevertheless he couldn't shake the feeling that something was sinister about this evening.

But nothing seemed to be wrong.

Why was Harry awake then?

Had he heard a noise? Was that the reason why he awoke from the slumber? The hairs upon the back of his neck stood up. Something wasn't right, he was sure of it. Although he couldn't explain what it was, he jumped out of bed and grabbed his wand. He would be damned if he allowed anything horrible to happen to his family tonight.

He walked carefully towards the bedroom door. The cedar wood was shadowed and a small speck of light shone in from the bottom. Harry glanced down at the space between the floor and the door and saw a shadow pass by.

Harry jumped back as the door burst open.

"Dad?!" Albus shouted, terrified at the wand that was pointed towards him. "What are you doing?"

Harry dropped his wand to the floor and chuckled pitifully. "Nothing, son. You startled me, that's all."

"Is everything all right?" he asked.

Harry flicked the curtains open with his wand. Morning light flooded in through the windows. He had slept the entire night without problem. "Yes, it is, son."

"I was coming to wake you up," Albus replied. "It's time for James and me to go to school."

Harry smiled. In a few seconds, he would rouse Ginny from her dreams and then they would both say goodbye to their sons. Harry breathed a sigh of relief and pulled Albus in for a quick embrace.

*All was well, Harry thought as he let Albus go. At least for now.*

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*And so we stand here motionless,  
waiting for the bitter end of all that is beautiful in this world;  
hoping only that the futures power will shed light on a new and  
wonderful destiny.*

*-Paul Acquasanta*

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*The rest is silence.*

*-William Shakespeare, Hamlet*

*Stories that inspired/influenced this story:*  
*"Back Again, Harry?" by Jedi Buttercup*  
*"Center of the Circle" by MarauderMac*  
*"Erasing the Future" by Moxterminator*  
*"Harry Potter and Fate's Debt" by Intromit*  
*"Harry Potter and the Time Mage" by MaxFic*  
*"Harry Potter and the Nightmares of Future's Past" by S'Tarkan*  
*"Notebooks and Letters" by chem prof*  
*"Need" by ilovefanfics1*  
*"The Seventh Horcrux" by Melindaleo*

*Stories you should read and review:*  
*"The Boggart" by SlytherinPrincess81*  
*"In the Words of Hermione Jean Weasley" by somerdaye*  
*"Tiger and Swan, Lily Potter's Story" by Phoenix214*  
*"Fantastical Truths" by L. Borealis*  
*"Great Expectations" by Cassandra's Cross*  
*"Things you didn't know about the NEXT GENERATION" by SlytherinPrincess81*

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When I first entered into the world of fanfiction last summer, I was sucked into the Ginny stories. This ultimately forced me to write one of my own.

While writing that story, I stumbled upon the interesting world of time travel stories. Now I can't recall which one I read first, but it was a rip-off of S'Tarkan's "Harry Potter and the Nightmares of Future's Past." Eventually I started reading that one and filling up on all the other random ones I would find. I was intrigued, to say the least.

And yet, as I read, something was bothering me. Most of the stories were similar, if not blatant copies rewritten and displayed as original works. I liked them all, mind you, but nobody had written the story that I wanted to read. All these stories were the same. All explored the option that the something had gone wrong in canon and it needed fixing. So the stories were just that. All the wonderful conflict from books 1-7 were erased for something far less exciting. No one was exploring the option that maybe the events of canon happened the

way they happened because it was the best possible outcome for everyone.

What is a story without conflict? To most, not much of a story. Lo and behold, my mind went into overdrive, obsessing over this slowly-developing story as it slowly ate away at me. And take note, this was ALL while writing "In the Words of Ginevra Molly Potter." I had to spend at least two months with this tale brewing inside my head, haunting me, begging me to write it before I could finally do so.

That is why after "In the Words...", I was unable to take a break. I really wanted to get out of this world of fanfiction, but it sucked me back in. This is also the reason why it took me five months to complete this 100,000 story whereas it took me the same amount of time to write a 200,000 word story. I wanted to take it slow and participate in real life.

There are many people I need to thank for this story. The first being all the authors of the stories that inspired me. If you get a chance to find them, read through their stories. Without them, I would not have been inspired to write this story.

GinnyGuerra: My only beta throughout this journey. Even though some people came and went, you stayed true and loyal. I've almost driven you insane while writing this story, but I hope you've recovered enough to accept your award as best beta ever.

GiseleWeasley: What is a story written by me if I forget to thank you? No matter how much you have begged, no matter how much you have threatened my life, I was able to keep all information from you. It was not an easy task, mind you, especially since even your little brother wanted to know everything as well. When the time comes, I would be honored if you translated this story, too.

SlytherinPrincess81: My wonderful Italian pen-pal! I have benefited immensely from just corresponding with you. It doesn't matter what we're talking about, whether it's working out the finer points to our stories (and all the details when it concerns your novels) or discussing our lives in general, I always look forward to receiving messages and reviews from you. (Even if you won't teach me that Snape dance.)

EnchantedGurls: I always looked forward to your reviews. Not only were they lengthy, but you *a/ways* were asking the right questions, always trying to dig deeper into the truth, and always influencing me in where a chapter was going. Sometimes even I hadn't thought of a certain element until you addressed it, and then it would all make sense.

And to everyone who has reviewed this story and has encouraged me. There's not enough room to name you all, but I appreciate every one of you.

JK Rowling: Once again, I doubt you would take the time to read this story. If you do, just know that I tried everything in my power to keep information accurate and characters portrayed as they should be. Thank you for this amazing world.

Little Known Facts About:

A Swiftly Tilting Planet: Chapter two's title was taken from a book authored by Madeleine L'Engle of the same name, which deals with time travel.

Back to the Future: I hope everyone caught one that chapter seven's title came from the 1985 time travel movie "Back to the Future" starring Michael J. Fox and Christopher Lloyd.

A Wrinkle in Time: Chapter sixteen's title was taken from another book by Madeleine L'Engle of the same title.

The Butterfly Effect: Chapter seventeen's title was taken from a movie of the same name starring Ashton Kutcher.

Pilgrimage: The title of chapter three is a play on words. In "Slaughterhouse V" by Kurt Vonnegut the main character's name is Billy Pilgrim, who is taught how to travel through time.

The Time Traveler: The title of chapter three comes from H.G. Well's "The Time Machine." In this story, the main character is only referred to as the time traveler.

William Emmett Cronus: William's first name is taken from "Slaughterhouse V" again (*Billy Pilgrim*). The middle name is Christopher Lloyd's character in "Back to the Future" (*Emmett Brown*). Although spelled differently, Cronus refers to the Greek legend of Chronus, the personification of time who takes a serpentine form with many heads.

Roberta Sparrow: (the tour guide in Cronus's house) This name is taken directly from "Donnie Darko."

Evan Tebron: (the student who was cursed by Cronus) This name is the exact name of Ashton Kutcher's character in "The Butterfly Effect."

Morgan Tebron: (Evan's mother) Her first name is taken from the main character's last name in "A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court" by Mark Twain (Hank Morgan).

What's next for The JeaLouS One?

The first thing that needs done concerns my life. I've been creating my resume and I've been sending it out to various newspapers, magazines, and publications for review. Why, you may ask? I'm graduating from BloomU on May 10th with a B.A. in Mass Communications/Journalism. That's number one right now on my priority list. Then it's looking for a career.

I said this before so I understand if you don't believe me, but I'd like to take a break. I've been writing for what feels like almost nine months straight and I need to step back and actually breathe a little bit. That doesn't mean I'm going to disappear. It just means that I need to focus on real life things. Maybe once everything is in order, I will return.

After all, if you could read between the lines, I have some stories brewing up inside my head. Unfortunately for all you readers, none of those ideas have the haunting power of the last two I have written. I'm not sitting in class dwelling on anything right now.



I would like to write Draco's POV still. And I've considered writing Hermione's story as well. Both of these would be rather complicated if I ever chose to dive into their voices.

I also think I've set up a decent Marauder's Generation story. It would narrate a countdown to James and Lily's deaths from the end of their sixth year. I'd also like to take a stab at a New Generation starring Albus Potter, but I don't have any grand adventure for him to participate in (and I refuse to write it unless I have a killer idea). I also feel that I could take any school year from "In the Words of Ginevra Molly Potter" and expand on that into a fuller, richer story (especially her sixth year). Not to mention that it would be amazing to explore Horcrux-Ginny.

Since I won't be writing any stories for awhile, I'm available to be a Beta or read over stories. SO USE ME!

So there you go! Thanks for sticking with me! If you care about "In the Words of Ginevra Molly Potter" and "Destiny Redefined," tell your friends. (And if you *don't* like it, your enemies.)

*thejealousone*

*The end*

*P.S. FAQ to come*

I am officially a 2008 graduate of Bloomsburg University. I have been sending my resumes around the state and am waiting for some callbacks. I have a part time job at *The News Item* in Shamokin, Pennsylvania until I can find something fulltime and more permanent. So things are decent right now.

I have already finished the post-production edits of "Destiny Redefined."

I have also been experimenting with Draco's story. Before I start it, I'd like to read what has been done with Mr. Malfoy. This is where I need **YOUR** help: please direct me to any good Draco stories you know.

### **Frequently Asked Questions**

*I cannot think of any other questions to answer. I attempted with the best of my ability to answer the questions I could find. If you'd like to see other questions on here, want me to explain an answer more clearly, or discuss a matter further with you, please don't hesitate to bring it up.*

Didn't you say you were going to wait to write another story?

I did say that, but this story was literally begging me to write it. I was thinking about it morning, day, and night. I was excited to get it started and I knew I'd lose the motivation if I waited any longer. That's how it is with my inspiration. If I know it's a good idea, my mind won't allow me to let it go.

I thought you didn't have the heart to make bad things happen!

I didn't have the heart to make bad things happen in the nineteen year gap since JK Rowling said all was well. This is why the story takes place twenty years later.

Explain time travel

Time travel is a difficult thing to explain. For one, I honestly believe it could not work on many different levels because it would violate logic. It creates far too many problems and paradoxes. Not that I don't enjoy my time travel stories (The Butterfly Effect, Back to the Future,

the Terminators) but there are simply too many impossibilities for it to work.

This is the major reason why I chose to explore the David Hume philosophy. In a nutshell, Hume says that we are a collection of thoughts, perceptions, and ideas. He goes on to say that we are *literally not* the same person we were twenty years ago or twenty minutes ago, rather we are simply one version of a long chain of versions of ourselves. I think this works perfectly for what I was trying to do.

This could easily explain that no matter what was changed, the Time Traveler would remember it and even leave open the possibility that if too much was changed or too much pressure was put on one version, they could break away from the timeline and become their own version.

In this story, when Harry travels back in time, he takes himself out of the order of his life. He separates himself from the timeline. Once he changes something and returns, he more or less bonds with the new version of himself. The version that existed in the new timeline would have disappeared at the exact moment Harry did. Harry would have acquired whatever memories he missed and even some of the emotions.

It's a difficult thing to follow and even harder to explain.

### Explain the cycle of this story

This story deals with the predestination paradox a great deal. The cycle started with one. Harry(a) traveled back in time to figure out why Ginny was hurt. In doing so, he ended up being the reason she was hurt in the first place and becoming the reason he would later travel back in time. Would this had happened if he hadn't traveled back in time? I'm not sure.

When he traveled further back in time, Harry(a) met with his past self. Harry(a) and Harry(b) ended up dueling and creating the Same-Wand-Effect. Harry(a) was transported back to the 1700s and Harry(b) was transported to an unknown location.

Harry (the one we have been following) meets William Cronus which ends up being Harry Potter himself. Cronus explains that he was guided by another version of themselves, one that most likely did many of the same things that Cronus was doing to Harry, which in turn, this one was also most likely influenced by another version, and so and so forth. The cycle was going on for an indefinite amount of time all the way back to Harry(b). We don't know what exactly Harry(b) has done, but we can be sure that his story must be similar to Cronus's story.

Cronus explained that his family was murdered. On the night he comes to murder Ginny, he realizes who has done it. When he says "It was us," he doesn't mean him and Harry, he means ALL Harry Potters. He comes to this conclusion by being in the same exact position every other version was sure to be in. He entered a hopeless world he could never escape, was too far gone from Ginny to ever get her back, and since his mind was mentally unstable, he refused to allow anyone else to have the woman he loved if he couldn't have her. He is sure (and is probably right) that all other versions reached the exact same conclusion he did, thus why he says it was destiny.

Now back to 1700s William Cronus. This is the predestination paradox again. There never was a real William Emmett Cronus. It was always Harry Potter. By going back in time with the journals and Time Turner, he was able to invent the Time Turner and follow the journals which would be saved throughout the centuries to be brought back with Harry when he came to the 1700s. Crazy, huh?

The thing we have to realize is that we are coming into this story at the end. We have only been following our hero for the conclusion and hundreds and hundreds of story have already been happening by the time we jump into the pages. Keep in mind that Harry was very close to restarting the cycle. His mind was a hair's breath away from breaking, his soul so close to cracking and separating from the timeline. He had every single item he needed to restart the cycle and do exactly what Cronus had done to him. Had he not burned the items, he would have cracked and everything would have repeated itself again.

How did you plan this all?

I had a long time to think about it. I was constantly dwelling on it, working out the major points of this story, and discussing it with any Harry Potter aficionados that would listen. I researched fan fictions to see what hasn't been done to make sure my ideas were original. I drew up the timelines to keep everything in order. Even with all that, it was difficult to keep everything in mind.

A lot of the key plot points were always planned: Horcrux-Ginny, Cronus being Harry, dementors, Cronus being the murderer, and the graveyard scene at the end. Many twists and turns though were added as I went along, almost as if the story was writing itself. Draco loving Ginny was not preplanned, and neither was Harry and Hermione being married.

One of the biggest twists of the story didn't come until it came time to write it. 1700s-William was never supposed to be Harry Potter as well, but I tried so hard to give clues that Cronus was Harry Potter that it ended up making complete sense. I had it all set up to go in that direction, I just had to discover it.

#### Was the ending always going to be happy?

I had it set up from the beginning to always have a happy ending. All the clues (especially the prophecy) were designed to conclude the story positively. Despite the intentions, I considered for a long time to end the story on a down note. It would have fit the story amazingly. The cycle would have repeated itself.

But I would have been forsaking the original plan, all the hard work setting up what I wanted. I didn't end it nicely because readers asked me to nor because I wanted it as well, I ended it as I did because that's how the story was supposed to be written.

#### Why do you hate Ginny so much?

I don't hate Ginny. In fact, she is my favorite character and I've been told I have a "literary crush" on the girl. That might be true, I don't know. So why did Ginny continuously die, get injured, and be the subject of so much heartache and turmoil?

In order for this story to work, Harry has to act solely on emotion. We all know how he gets when someone he cares about is in danger. Ginny is the most important thing to Harry, his connection to a normal life. It *has* to be Ginny because no one other death would have such a profound impact.

#### Why did you invent Dora?

Dora Molly Potter was invented in the last chapter of “In the Words of Ginevra Molly Potter” before I was aware that JK Rowling intended for Ginny and Harry to only have three children. In the last chapter, Ginny discovers she is pregnant with her fourth child. Since I am less dedicated to post-Deathly Hallows revelations, I opted to keep that detail in my new story.

#### Who is Dominick?

According to JK Rowling, Dudley’s children would not be magical because magical blood would not survive Vernon’s DNA. Despite the fact that this detail was not available when I wrote this in “In the Words...” I still think that it’s a lousy revelation. Sure, maybe it didn’t survive Vernon, but Dudley’s wife in this story is also connected to magic through blood so I bypassed that problem.

I imagine Dudley and Helen (his wife) to have a good relationship with the Potters, especially when they started to realize that their son was displaying magical abilities. Dominick and Teddy are also about the same age so I also imagine them being fairly good friends.

#### Why did Harry drink that potion?

Since Cronus was Harry Potter, he was able to manipulate his actions and thoughts. He knew exactly what to say to stir Harry’s mind and influence him in the way he wished. Since Cronus had already lived through the events, he knew the time was perfect for him to come and use Harry. And since he caught Harry in a vulnerable time *and* knew how to deal with him, Harry never really had a chance.

Not to mention that Harry didn’t know bad things were going to happen. He thought it was going to be a beneficial trip. After all, what

would be so wrong in stopping a mad man before he had the chance to destroy people's lives, take over the government, and commit countless atrocities? Harry was acting like the hero he feels he needs to be.

Do you think Wormtail was there on that Halloween night?

Someone had to retrieve Voldemort's wand and since Wormtail was the one to *have* it later in the books, it makes sense for him to be there. He also might have assisted the spectral form of the Dark Lord, but that doesn't make as much sense.

Didn't Dolohov kill Gideon and Fabian?

Since the information was not directly mentioned in book canon, I didn't feel guilty altering it to fit this story. Voldemort *did not* kill the Prewett twins in Rowling's world, but in this particular story, it worked better.

Why didn't anyone figure out that Harry was time traveling?

I established that time travel as Harry was experiencing was thought to be either impossible or non-existent. No one (except maybe Xeno Lovegood) would propose such an idea when no one believed it could happen. The logical reason for multiple Harrys would be magical deception such as Polyjuice. Even if someone *did* figure it out, odds are likely that they wouldn't know for long, especially if the traveler was constantly altering events.

What's going on with Dudley?

I think it would have been extremely possible for the scenario I described to happen. Since magical ability can be revealed by accident via frustration and anger, I think the Dursleys would have spoiled and coddled Dudley *even if* they weren't advised by Dumbledore for the similar reasons. Once Harry was revealed to be a Wizard, Vernon and Petunia made it their goal to make sure everyone in that house knew it was abnormal. We know that magical abilities can be stifled through depression (think Merope Gaunt), so why not parental influence and prejudice?

So DID Draco love Ginny in the original timeline?

In my opinion, no!

Are the new timelines parallel to each other?

The new timelines are not parallel, they are the only reality.

Why would Harry fall for Ginny in the new timeline?

I honestly think Harry was always attracted to Ginny and that the possibility for him to realize that could have happened at any moment during the series. Harry was attracted to Ginny's type (small, short, shiny-haired) and I doubt his attractions changed even if he was not a Horcrux. There are many reasons why I feel this way (check out ?actiongringotts&sthglovered to see). Add their intertwined lives and you have more reason.

I know Ginny sounds bitchy when she yells at Harry at the Yule Ball but she was frustrated. She was noticing Harry's attraction towards her and realizing that he didn't see it. Then when she had her chance to show him a good time, he couldn't focus on her. She didn't date throw herself at the first guy that paid attention to her, she liked Michael. And the reason she stopped talking to Harry was to get over him. She wanted to have a good relationship with Michael, but if she was constantly around Harry, it wasn't going to work for her.

Was Harry's first year the same if he was not a Horcrux?

The Horcrux did not play a very big role in the SS. The scar was used only as a plot device for Harry to mistakenly suspect Snape instead of Quirrell. So yes, his first year would have remained relatively the same.

Why did Ginny stay dead when she was willing to die?

That's a great question, one that a lot people have asked, but also one a lot of people don't really understand from canon to begin with. The Horcrux had nothing to do with Harry being given a choice. Since Voldemort used Harry's blood to rebuild a body, Voldemort carried Lily's protection into his body, inadvertently making himself a make-



shift Horcrux for Harry. As long as Voldemort lived, Harry lived, BUT the part inside Harry that was Voldemort WAS NOT protected by Lily's blood, thus the killing curse took care of the Horcrux, but left Harry still intact. Ginny only played host to Voldemort's soul. As long as Voldemort lived, Harry lived. In the new timeline, no one willingly sacrificed themselves for Ginny, thus there was no magical protection running through her veins even if Voldemort would have used Ginny's blood. Therefore no choice was given to Ginny. I'm sure if she was given a choice, she would have chosen to return.

Wouldn't Harry's soul be split if he used the killing curse?

Simply using the Avada does not split the soul. Murder is nearly the means in which a dark wizard can use in order to do so.

Why can't Harry remember things right away?

When Harry created a new timeline, he also created a lifetime of new memories. He would be sifting through nearly 80 years worth of events. Since we do not remember every single thing all at once, it would take a while to recall information.

What's up with Snape and the vicious dog?

I was paying homage to fan fiction summaries. You know the kind. "Ever wonder what it would be like if Harry was a girl?" "Find out what would happen if James and Sirius were lovers." One that made me laugh talked about Snape and a dog.

Was I suppose to laugh at the Hermione twist?

Yes, that was the intention. I tried to build up that particular scene as something momentous. Having it end up being Hermione felt like a break from all the death. It was supposed to be lighthearted. So go back and laugh if you hesitated to do so originally.

Why Hermione and Neville for Harry and Ginny?

It needed to be Hermione because it made Harry feel uncomfortable, but comfortable enough to stay with her. It needed to be Neville because he was a good friend to Harry. It created a whole new kind

of conflict. If it had been Pansy and Draco, I'm sure Harry wouldn't have felt conflicted about staying in the world or seeking Ginny out for an extramarital affair.

### Why didn't Cronus just wait a year and stop the events himself?

By the time Cronus appeared in the past and was stuck, his mind had already deteriorated. He had been traveling backwards multiple times and was convinced he could change future events by doing the same thing again. He feels that present-Harry, unaffected by his family's murders, could make better judgments in the past. Simply put, Cronus was mentally unstable.

### What's the deal with Ginny and Ron?

Love-potion-Ginny is a theory that anti-canon shippers have used to explain how Harry had fallen for Ginny. Abuser-Ron is a reason that they also have used to downgrade Ron and Hermione's romance. I selected these reasons and exploited them. I still feel that what I have portrayed is in character. After all, Ginny was a bit obsessive to wait for someone for that many years. Ron did have a bit of a temper. Those negative parts of their personalities were simply enhanced by the death of their father.

I do not think Ginny used a love potion in canon. I do not think Ron was abusive either. If you want to discuss this further, I'll gladly debate you.

### Why does Harry and Hermione's relationship feel awkward?

I'd like to say that I did it on purpose, but I cannot. It was extremely difficult for me to write a relationship that I don't believe could have worked. Therefore the relationship ended up awkward, which turned out to be beneficial for the story anyhow. Instead of a genuine relationship, they clung to each other, fueled by the failed relationships they were in. Did they love each other? Yes, I think they did, but not as strong as it should have been.

### Did Harry have feelings for Ginny anyhow?

As I've said before, I think Harry always had an attraction towards Ginny. It is quite possible then that Harry had feelings for Ginny.

#### Why did Arthur die?

Arthur lived originally because Harry saw it happen via the Horcrux. Since no one was the Horcrux this time around, Arthur was sure to die.

#### Would Ginny and Harry have had an affair?

You can decide this one on your own. I personally believe that Harry would have stuck with his belief that he could live in this world where he was friends with Ginny, but not being with her would have driven him to pursue an affair. If not for the murders, I think it would have happened.

#### Were the characters happy in the second timeline?

The characters were happy with their lives, they just felt something was missing. They were not fully satisfied with where their lives ended up. Even Ron, despite his appearance in the chapter, would have been far happier than he was being shown. He would have been still in love with Hermione, but I think he would have gotten by okay.

#### Is Cronus starting to sound like a fan?

You caught me! I was poking fun at the fans of the series who are desperately trying to get their ship sailed that they would "kill" just to see it.

#### What do Harry and Ginny's respective sons feel about their parents' romance?

The loss of a parent would have a horrible effect on both of them, but I like to think that Harry and Ginny played a healing role in Frank and James's lives. By the time the romance happened, the children would have been fine with it.

#### What happened with the wands?

If one wand meeting its brother results in what it did, something incredible had to happen when one wand would meet its exact copy. Since wands are so powerful, the magic meeting itself ripped a hole in existence that would not be closed until the wands passed through. I imagine the hole leading to alternate worlds, parallel universes, maybe even nothingness.

With the introduction of a time turner or the time potion, the hole would act as a portal to another time. That is how the travelers were able to go beyond their natural timeline.

Why did Harry talk to Dumbledore?

Frankly, I can't think of anyone better to explain the events of Harry's life than the former Headmaster. All seven books he was there to do so. It felt right to me.

Why did Albus get the Cloak?

Contrary to some belief, Harry was not favoring one son over another. He allowed James to get away with keeping the map, which made the decision of who to give the Cloak much easier. Not to mention that Dumbledore said Al was going to play an important role. What better tool to use than the Cloak?

Why can't Harry remember the events?

The events would have felt like a bad dream since he had nothing to prove it to himself. Since he had returned to the original timeline, the other worlds were ceasing to exist and would lose the desire to keep those memories. He most likely fought hard to keep his original memories when he spent a year in the other timeline.